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KEY TERMS

- Foster Care: temporary homes for children separated from their birth parents
- Adoption: permanently welcoming children into a family
- Kinship Care: relatives or close family friends providing temporary/permanent care
- Department of Family & Protective Services (DFPS or CPS): child welfare agency tasked with protecting children, the elderly, and those with disabilities
- Residential Treatment Center (RTC) or Group Residential Organization (GRO): residential child care facilities for children in foster care but without a foster family; RTCs and GROs house 13+ children at any given time
- Trauma Informed Care: a treatment modality that takes into consideration the pervasive nature of trauma, promoting environments of healing and recovery rather than practices and services that inadvertently re-traumatize

THE RIVER

"Imagine three friends come upon a raging river. They see children in the water rushing down the rapids toward a waterfall. One friend immediately jumps into the river and begins pulling as many children out as he can. Knowing there's a waterfall downstream, the second friend runs down river and tries to catch as many children as he can before they fall over the cliff. The third friend, however, wonders why these children are in the river in the first place. He runs upstream to find out how he can put a stop to it. All three friends are running in three different directions, each addressing different yet equally important points of the problem—there are kids in the water and we need to get them out."

Jason Johnson

National Director of Church Ministry Initiatives, Christian Alliance for Orphans

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Our Mission

The Riverside Project is a collaborative initiative to inform and mobilize Houston's churches to respond strategically to the foster care crisis.

Who We Are: The Riverside Project (TRP) is an initiative by Fostering Family, a nonprofit committed to strengthening foster/kinship families and the communities that surround them through training and collaboration. As Founder and Executive Director, Amber Knowles will oversee the development of TRP with the help of the Fostering Family staff. However, in order to address the crisis comprehensively, Fostering Family will also mobilize its growing network of collaborative partners (DFPS, agencies, churches, and other nonprofits).

What We Do: We equip and mobilize churches to work together to meet the needs of the foster care system in their respective areas, until every child in Houston has a loving and stable home.

Marketing Highlights: Fostering Family is a "Bridge Network," a non-competing entity that serves as a liaison between churches and other public and private organizations. As a neutral organization, we are uniquely positioned to achieve precisely what we envision.

Financial Plan Highlights: We value fiscal sustainability, so TRP is an inexpensive program by design. We do not compete with agencies for state funding; we rely upon individual and organization donors, church partners, foundation grants, and corporate sponsorships.

Our Request

We launched The Riverside Project in August 2020 in the Kingwood/Humble area, and we are continuing to expand the work into new communities. We are asking church and community leaders to partner with us as we work together to care for vulnerable children and families across the Houston area.



Key Team Members:

Amber Knowles, Founder & Executive Director Megan Mark, Director of Development & Communications Kathleen Cowie, Director of Training & Education

See pages 7-8 for more information.

Mission Statement:

The Riverside Project is a collaborative initiative to inform and mobilize Houston's churches to respond strategically to the foster care crisis.

Beneficiaries:

Primary: Houston's foster children and their families

As of December 2019, there were 2,545 children in foster care in our Region (Harris and surrounding counties). 479 were living in group homes (not with a foster family), and 53 in emergency shelters. An additional 1,200 children are being cared for by relatives (kinship care). And there were 451 children awaiting adoption. First and foremost, we serve the names and faces behind these statistics.

Secondary: Houston's churches

We desire to come alongside church leaders to help mobilize a more active, more engaged, and more empathetic congregation. It's a privilege to serve at-risk children and marginalized families, and it's an opportunity to grow in humility and selflessness.



Target Customers:

We believe mobilizing and equipping the Church is the most effective and sustainable strategy for improving the manner in which Houston cares for its most vulnerable citizens, children in the foster care system. We work with churches directly, and we facilitate collaboration between churches so that the Church in Houston can address the crisis holistically, at all points along the river.

Collaborative Partners:



Ashley Smalls

Faith Based Specialist Texas Department of Family and Protective Services



Jason Johnson

National Director of Church Ministry Initiatives Christian Alliance for Orphans

Services Overview:

Participating churches will gain access to tools, resources, and coaching toward the establishment and/or improvement of a foster/adoptive initiative within their congregation. The Riverside Project staff will also facilitate sector-specific workshops on a quarterly basis, an annual gathering of all participants, and ongoing consultation. TRP will also give participants the opportunity to collaborate with other churches and organizations at all points along the river.

Our Distinct Advantage: "Neutrality"

There are numerous agencies and organizations serving Houston's foster children, but there is little meaningful collaboration. Our city's efforts are divided and our resources are fragmented, which means that our impact is limited. Because Fostering Family is a "neutral" nonprofit (not an agency, government institution, or church), we are uniquely positioned to facilitate connection and collaboration. To borrow language from The Christian Alliance for Orphans, The Riverside Project is a "Bridge Network," a non-competing entity that acts as a liaison between churches and other public and private organizations.

ABOUT US

The Riverside Project is an initiative by Fostering Family, a 501c3 nonprofit committed to strengthening foster/kinship families and the communities that surround them through training and collaboration.

In 2018, Fostering Family launched The Babysitting Collaborative, a multi-agency training course for foster and kinship babysitters. Per state requirements, foster and kinship babysitters must be background checked, fingerprinted, CPR & First Aid certified, etc. The process is time-consuming, confusing, inconvenient and expensive. As a result, many foster families are isolated and unsupported.

In partnership with 22 child placing agencies, we created a one day training that covers the basic requirements for babysitters and expedites the documentation process.



Amber Knowles
Founder & Executive Director

Amber is a mother of 4, including 2 adopted through foster care. She has a BSN from Baylor University and an MSN from the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. Prior to founding Fostering Family, Amber worked as a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner, specializing in pediatric community health and school-based healthcare. She is a certified trainer in the Trauma Competent Caregiver (TCC) curriculum and was recently appointed Chair of the Provider's Workgroup for the Coalition for Child Serving Sectors, a collaborative project within Harris County's child welfare system spearheaded by the Texas Alliance for Child and Family Services.



Since August 2018:

22 Child Placing Agencies340 Babysitters Trained155 Foster Families Represented93 Churches Represented

ABOUT US (CONT.)



Megan Mark, Director of Development & Communications

Megan earned both her Bachelors and Masters from Texas A&M. She previously worked as an Individual Giving Coordinator for the Hermann Park Conservancy and Community Relations & Event Manager for Kendra Scott. Megan specializes in donor relations, but also helps with event coordination, marketing, and social media. Megan and her husband are currently in the foster care licensing process.



Kathleen Cowie, Director of Training & Education

Kathleen earned a Master's of Social Work from the U of H, following a degree in Family and Human Services from John Brown University. She has served as a research assistance focusing on child welfare and as a direct care provider at an emergency shelter for children and youth in care. She is a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) and certified trainer in Trauma Competent Caregiver (TCC). Kathleen is well-equipped to train, educate, and coach individuals and groups toward sustainable change within the child welfare system.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mark Felder, President

Amber Robinson, Treasurer

Jennifer Clifford

Chelsea Rebollar

Rachel Lake, Vice President

Hji Washington

Tara Hutton

Megan Mark, Secretary

THE NEED

Greater Houston is home to over 3,000 Christian churches, and many are eager to serve their vulnerable neighbors, especially children. However, most of these churches are under-informed as to the need and/or unsure how to get involved.

In addition, there is very little meaningful collaboration between organizations advocating for children in the foster care system, much less for their caretakers.

In recent years, the Texas state government has called upon faith communities in particular to assist in caring for children in the foster care system. But again, few of these communities are aware of this, much less poised and organized to respond.

First and foremost, we want to ensure that foster and kinship parents in the Houston area are getting the support they need.
These are the people doing the daily work of caring for vulnerable children. If their task is unsustainable, it will inhibit Houston's ability to retain and recruit families to meet the demand. However, with some training, coaching, and collaboration, churches are well-positioned to offer this support.

Second, due to a foster home shortage, there are nearly 500 children living in RTCs and GROs. These children need mentors and families to provide long-term support and stable relationship. These facilities also need community support.

Third, CPS workers have an incredibly difficult job. On our behalf, they step into dark and traumatic situations to advocate for children, facing discouragement, fatigue, and secondary trauma in the process. They too need the support of Houston's churches. In fact, of the 14 CPS offices in Harris County, many have specifically asked for prayer and support. Only 2 of those 14 are currently receiving ongoing support from churches.

Lastly, there are a number of counseling centers in the city of Houston, but very few who are trained to work with children who have experienced complex trauma. We want to facilitate training for these centers.

Houston is ripe for a program like The Riverside Project. It's long overdue.

1915 Licensed Foster Homes

2336 Children in the Foster System

399 Children Awaiting Adoption



In general, Houston's foster/kinship families are lacking in support, and Houston's foster agencies and nonprofits rarely collaborate. We launched the Babysitting Collaborative for precisely these reasons. And we believe The Riverside Project is our next best step. We have grown the support base for foster/kinship families, we have increased inter-agency collaboration, and we are now looking to engage the Church directly. Many Houston churches are eager to engage the foster care system, but most are under-informed and unsure how to engage strategically. Nevertheless, with some training, consultation, and collaboration, churches are well-positioned to meet a number of pressing needs, including:

- (1) cultivating healthy support systems for foster families,
- (2) recruiting new foster/adoptive families,
- (3) mentoring children in group homes and residential treatment centers,
- (4) sponsoring CPS offices and supporting case workers, and
- (5) developing Trauma-Informed Counseling Centers.

In order to assist the Church in meeting these needs, we have divided Harris County into 12 sectors (see page 11). For each sector, we are working to identify:

- (1) churches desiring to engage the needs of the foster care system,
- (2) existing foster parent support groups and Parent Night Out events,
- (3) all residential treatment centers (RTCs) and group homes,
- (4) all CPS offices, and
- (5) all counseling centers.

In other words, we are developing a strategic framework for engaging and mobilizing churches to serve their respective sectors. We have allotted 3 months for the launch of each sector.



Mobilize the Church:

Support Families:

Building support systems Mobilizing your congregation for foster/adoptive/kinship to serve specific needs in families in your church. your sector of the city.

Strengthen the Community:

Collaborating with other churches and organizations to multiply our impact.

- We have divided Harris County into 12 sectors (see page 13), and we are looking for leaders from within the church community who can foster collaboration within their respective sectors.
- Through collaborative workshops, ongoing coaching, and connections to upstream and downstream partners, we will equip and mobilize churches to support the foster care needs within their respective sectors. We want to see various churches engaged at various points along the river, working alongside one another to meet every need in their sector.
- In addition to fostering collaboration *within* the sectors, we will foster collaboration *between* the sectors, until every child in Houston has a loving and stable home.



PREVENTION UPSTREAM

Public Schools Crisis Pregnancy Addiction Recovery Family Development

INTERVENTION MIDSTREAM

Foster Care
Adoption
Supporting Families
Mentoring Teens & Parents

RESTORATION DOWNSTREAM

Prison Ministries Homeless Ministries Anti-Human Trafficking Education

WE WANT TO HELP
CHURCHES
TO FIND THEIR PLACE ALONG
THE RIVER.

JAN - JUL 2020

PRE-LAUNCH

County-wide Research Curriculum Development Strategic Planning Fundraising

AUG 2020

YEAR 1 BEGINS

AUG - OCT 2020

LAUNCH PILOT

Sector 1: Kingwood/Humble

AUG: Support Families SEP: Mobilize Churches OCT: Strengthen Communities NOV - DEC 2020

ANALYSIS

Sector 1 Pilot

What worked? What needs revision? Adequately resourced?

JAN - MAR 2021

SECTOR 2

Sector 2: Spring/Klein

JAN: Support Families FEB: Mobilize Churches MAR: Strengthen Communities

APR - JUN 2021

SECTOR 3

To Be Determined

APR: Support Families MAY: Mobilize Churches

JUN: Strengthen Communities

JUN - JUL 2021

ANALYSIS

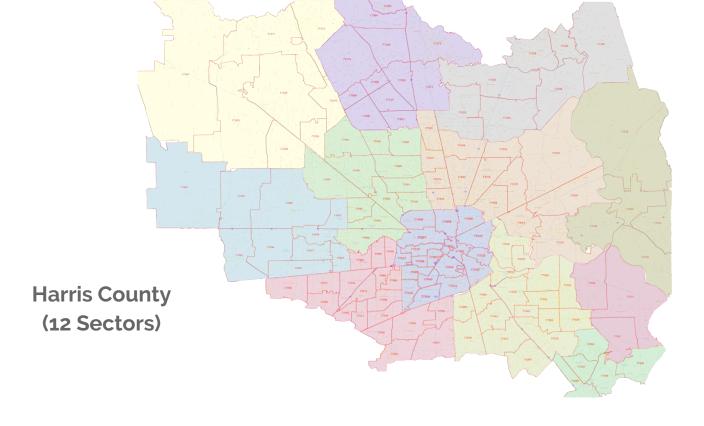
Year One

What worked? What needs revision? Adequately resourced?

OCT 2021

CELEBRATE

First Annual All-Sector Banquet



OUR GOALS

- First and foremost, we want a loving and stable home for every child in Houston. We want to recruit until Houston achieves a surplus of well equipped foster and kinship homes (more homes than children in need of homes).
- We want to see at least 5 actively participating churches per sector. Ideally, these 5+ churches can coordinate with one another to achieve each of the following goals:
 - Each and every CPS office sponsored/adopted by at least one church.
 - Each and every Residential Treatment Center (RTC) sponsored/ adopted by at least one church.
 - At least one quarterly foster/kinship parent's night out (PNO) in every sector.
 - Foster/kinship parent support groups in every sector.
 - Trauma-informed counseling centers in every sector.

TRP CHURCHES

Church who participate in The Riverside Project understand that in order to meet the foster care needs in our city, we must work together. No single congregation can do all that needs to be done. We need a city-wide, collaborative effort from hundreds of churches. TRP churches work together to share resources, to learn from one another, to support DFPS and other agencies, and to advocate for families and children in need.

Each TRP Church agrees to:

- Labor alongside Fostering Family & TRP collaborative organizations to mobilize the congregation to meet sector-specific foster care needs.
- Share resources, collaborate on events and trainings, and seek to strengthen other organizations.
- Adhere to the three TRP Core Convictions (see right).
- Serve as coaches or mentors to other congregations (if requested).
- Participate in sector-specific collaborative workshops.
- Participate in the annual gathering of TRP partners.

Compassion

The word *compassion* comes from the Latin *compati*, which means "to suffer with." What distinguishes compassion from sympathy or empathy? Action. TRP churches desire to act on behalf of the needy, to *relieve* suffering by *stepping into* suffering.

Community

We believe foster care is a community project. Every foster family needs a support system, and TRP churches are committed to mobilizing their own congregations to foster children or to support those who do.

Collaboration

Unity and collaboration require humility. TRP churches genuinely desire to set aside their differences in order to resource and bolster one another for the sake of vulnerable children in Houston.

Financial Commitment

Fostering Family and TRP collaborative organizations are committed to equipping your congregation through shared resources, coaching, training, curriculum, consultation, and referrals. In turn, we want to see churches multiplying their impact by resourcing and collaborating with others.

We offer these resources free of charge to churches. But of course, we depend upon donations in order to operate. TRP churches who partner with us financially invest not only in their own sector, but also in the sectors to come.

FINANCIAL PLAN

Fostering Family launched in November 2018 and was granted 501c3 status in May 2019. As a "neutral" nonprofit, we do not compete with child placing agencies for state funding. Rather, we rely upon funding from individual and organization donors (including churches), foundation grants, and corporate sponsorships.

Fiscal Sustainability

Aside from staff salaries, our programs, like our Babysitting Collaborative have been largely self-sustaining. Prior to COVID, babysitters paid only \$10 for babysitter certification training, and host churches subsidized the remaining costs, including lunch. Since June 2020, we have taken babysitter training virtual by utilizing a secure portal. This has allowed us to continue serving families while re-allocating funds to cover additional CPR certifications for babysitters and foster families.

By utilizing community resources, we are able to scale our programs to make them more stream-lined and innovative. This allows us to grow our programming and expand our staff without significant financial burden.

The Riverside Project

TRP is an inexpensive program by design. Equipping and collaboration are achieved primarily through staff labor. We have developed curriculum and receive consultation from experts in the field. There are also costs associated with quarterly workshops and an annual gathering of partners.

Financial partnership is not a requirement for TRP participating churches, but we do rely on donations to continue providing free resources, coaching, training, curricula, consultation, and referrals. Churches who partner with us financially are investing not only in their own sector, but also the sectors to come. There are two primary ways in which to partner financially: (1) annual gifts and (2) percent of quarterly income.

Annual Gift

Some churches set aside a recommended \$4 per church member: \$2 to support community partners and foster/adoptive families within their church + \$2 to support Fostering Family's efforts in providing resources for foster/kinship families citywide.

Percent of Quarterly Income

Some smaller churches (<250 members) give 2% of their quarterly income. Like the annual gift, we recommend setting aside 1/2 to support families and community partners and 1/2 to support TRP efforts city-wide. As churches grow numerically, we recommend growing that percentage.

Please see The Riverside Project Budget in the Appendix (page 20).

PARTICIPATING CHURCHES

























PARTICIPATING CHURCHES

















PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS















Department of Family and Protective Services















TRP Budget Year One

We anticipate approximately \$60,000 in TRP operational expenses for year one. If we exceed our funding goals, we hope to hire a Director of Church Engagement to oversee this project as it expands across the city of Houston.

This budget was executed in July 2020 and TRP launched to the public in August 2020.

Individual contributions	\$15,000.00
Partner churches (x10)	\$50,000.00
In-kind donations	\$1,500.00
Total Income	\$66,500.00
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Expenses	
Executive Director (50% salary)	\$17,500.00
Director of Dev & Comms (10% salary)	\$6,000.00
Director of Training & Ed (20% salary)	\$10,000.00
Payroll Taxes	\$2,757.87
Staff Expense Accounts	\$300.00
Total Personnel Expenditures	\$36,557.87
Consultation/Coaching	\$5,000.00
Total Contracted Services	\$5,000.00
Marketing Materials	\$2,000.00
Web Development	\$500.00
Curriculum Development	\$1,500.00
Promo Video	\$5,000.00
Total Marketing	\$9,000.00
Conferences and Seminars	\$500.00
Travel	\$500.00
Total Professional Development	\$1,000.00
Printing	\$2,000.00
Office Supplies/Materials	\$1,000.00
Total Administrative	\$3,000.00
Hardware (IPADs, devices, etc)	\$500.00
Total Technology	\$500.00
Workshop: Meals (x9)	\$2,000.00
Annual Gathering: Meals	\$2,000.00
Annual Gathering: Venue	\$1,000.00
Annual Gathering: Decor/Materials	\$500.00
Total Events	\$5,500.00
Total Expenses	\$60,557.87

APPENDIX

Endorsements

The good future of Houston depends on a unified Church stepping into the gaps to contend for the vulnerable, marginalized, abused, and neglected. The Riverside Project is not only "mission-critical" to that good future, but through it, Fostering Family brings cohesion, leadership, and vision to the many helpful but disparate orphan-care efforts of God's people here in Houston. I am hard pressed to think of more important and urgent work than caring for the orphans of our city. The people of God must be the place of rest, refuge, and hope for those discarded by the world. For in so doing and becoming, the Church honors the Imago-Dei in all people, lives out its mission with coherence and grit, and shows those on the margins that Jesus the Christ is with us and therefore with them. Fostering Family has my wholehearted commendation

Austin Hermann, Director of the Center for Faith, Work, and Innovation at First Presbyterian Church, Houston

Fostering Family is a phenomenal resource for foster care organizations and the foster families they support throughout the Greater Houston area. The collaborative babysitter certification courses provided by Fostering Family allow foster care agencies to focus staff resources on recruiting and supporting foster families with the assurance that the babysitters who participate in the babysitting course are well-trained and ready to provide support to foster parents.

DeJuana Jernigan, President and CEO Arms Wide Adoption Services

The realities that vulnerable children and families face are complex, and there are few leaders in the field who are truly devoted to navigating the system and advocating for the best and highest good of families of origin, foster families, and children. It seems that there are many agencies and organizations that connect on some level with one or another, but there are almost none who are able to see the importance and impact of each role. Amber Knowles has experienced the child protective system firsthand as a foster mom. She is well aware of the gaps, and through Fostering Family, she is seeking to build bridges that can truly make a difference!

Toni Steere, Director Legacy 685 at Houston's First

Fostering Family strengthens the caregivers who step up to care for and nurture these children twenty-fours a day, seven days a week at much sacrifice to their own needs and resources. They do this through training babysitters, material support, and guidance. Fostering Family provides these services in partnership with many agencies within the city of Houston in a true, collaborative fashion. With these services, the foster and kinship families are able to be there for the children who rely on them and truly give of themselves. I am excited about seeing the growth an expansion of these vital programs in Houston.

Joel Levine, Executive Director Harris County Protective Services

I praise God that Fostering Family is in Houston. God's heart beats fast for children in distress, and Fostering Family is doing a great job connecting God's people to God's passion – for that I am incredibly grateful!

Jeremiah Morris, Lead Pastor Seven Mile Road



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