

Go Upstream

2025 IMPACT REPORT



AMERICA'S
KIDS BELONG™



GOING UPSTREAM TO CREATE BELONGING



In 2025 America’s Kids Belong celebrated 10 years of progress to dramatically improve the experiences and outcomes for kids in foster care.

It is work that yields downstream, generational impact, illuminated by last year’s release of Brian Mavis’ book, **Go Upstream: Diving Into Foster Care To Heal 10 Social Wounds**. (See sidebar.)

It is rare to see foster care rank among the top issues of concern to Americans, yet kids who experience foster care often lack a sense of belonging. Detached from families, they are far more vulnerable to the issues that do make headlines—homelessness, poverty, trafficking, incarceration, addiction and more.

The goal of this report each year is to be accountable to you, our investors, for the impact we’re generating. We hold our measurable impact in delicate balance with individual stories of lives changed.

This year we are proud to report some big numbers. And we are grateful to share some of the stories of how America’s Kids Belong is caring for children, families and communities.

Our Shared Leadership Team

Phil Grizzle
Executive Director Operations

Brian Mavis
Executive Director Strategic Partnerships

Nanette Kirsch
Executive Director Marketing Communication

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In celebration of our 10-year anniversary AKB co-founder Brian Mavis published his book, **Go Upstream: Diving Into Foster Care To Heal 10 Social Wounds**, revealing how foster care is a root cause of many major societal issues, especially when youth age out without a family and face disproportionate risks for:



Poverty

One-third of foster alumni live at or below the poverty line.



Homelessness

20% of foster youth will become homeless the day they age out.



Addiction & Trafficking

A majority of child sex-trafficking victims, ranging from 50% to 90%, have been in foster care; many battle addiction.



Incarceration

43% of women and 74% of men who were in foster care have been incarcerated at least once.

Go Upstream matches this shocking data with touching stories that underscore the urgency to ensure every child belongs by 18. At their best great programs promote connection, but it is family that truly holds the power to change lives. (For more on this topic be sure to read Brian's Forbes Council Editors' Pick, "[Building Belonging: How Nonprofits Can Lead With Connection.](#)")

AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE



1. Trauma



3. Suicide



5. Addiction



7. Homelessness



9. Teen Pregnancy



2. Physical Illness



4. Sex Trafficking



6. Poverty



8. Incarceration



10. Generational Foster Care



Get the Book

– Inspiring Action – FOSTERING FRONT DOOR

In 2025 we formally launched Fostering Front Door, building on a decade of trust and digital growth to meet rising interest in foster care, with clear pathways for learning and action.

This momentum was fueled by platforms we introduced in 2024, including the Foster Friendly Podcast and the FosterCon webinar series. Through

FosterCon, foster parents earn continuing education credits, reducing barriers to support and strengthening retention. Notably, about 30% of participants across both platforms are social workers, extending AKB's reach deep into the child welfare system.

Together, these efforts are turning curiosity into understanding—and understanding into action.



AWARENESS & REACH

15 mil +
Social media reach
(166% increase)

421,000
AKB website visitors
(134% increase)



ENGAGEMENT & INQUIRY

5,176
Website inquiries (166% increase)



EDUCATION & FORMATION

Top 25% of
podcasts
Foster Friendly Podcast

21,000
Downloads

85
Episodes

30,000 times
FosterCon webinars and blog
content accessed



A Change of Heart

Jess and her husband, former jail deputies, met many parents in custody and got motivated to explore fostering with a "savior" mindset. She told an AKB team member, "I listened to the [podcast] episode you shared and many more last night. I realized I need to change the way I'm talking about fostering and how we pursue it." The podcast helped her learn about fostering in a fresh way; she added, "Other podcasts talk about how hard it is, but the Foster Friendly Podcast also offers hope."

Understanding the Grief of Adoption

One of our top episodes of the past year was our interview with Pam Bauer, a biblical counselor who adopted 14 kids. Among many evocative insights, Pam explained, "There's something missing in the way we do adoption care with kids....If a couple lost their child, we wouldn't show up six months later and say, 'Here's a new child who's going to replace the one you lost, so go forward with your life.' But that is kind of what we do in adoption."

– Engaging Communities – FOSTER FRIENDLY

*"Not everyone can foster or adopt,
but we can all do something."*

We put feet to this mantra with our Foster Friendly Community initiative and App, which connect individuals, faith communities, businesses, nonprofits and local events in support of local foster families in practical, everyday ways.



COMMUNITY PARTNERS

225

faith communities

2,833

business discounts

3,719

total community listings



COMMUNITY REACH & ENGAGEMENT

21,054

unique users

11,042

foster families served



SUPPORT IN ACTION

308

Foster Friendly support events (all time)



Colorado Chick-fil-A's Moo-tivate Foster Families

In Arvada and Longmont, Colorado Kids Belong hosted community activation initiatives. In partnership with CAFO's More Than Enough, they launched Foster Friendly programs like Parents Night Out, supported by two Foster Friendly Chick-fil-A locations that donated food, brought the cow and did so much for our families. Several people reached out afterward to share how overwhelmed they were by the generosity.

Kansas Inspired By A Trauma-Aware Babysitters Club

Kansas Kids Belong enjoyed a beautiful collaboration with a Foster Friendly "Babysitters Club," teens who got trauma trained to be able to serve foster families. So far they have donated 53 hours of childcare to kinship and foster and adoptive families via their Foster Friendly churches.

Tennesseans Get Foster Friendly

Charlotte works as a community engagement manager with Tennessee Kids Belong in the Chattanooga area. At a recent meeting community members turned Foster Friendly inspiration into action by:

1. Identifying two are churches to invite
2. Texting business-owner friends to invite them to join the app
3. Creating a Foster Friendly Facebook group to promote events and resources
4. Planning a parent recruitment panel

"It was just the perfect combination of the right people in the right room, and a community showing up for their kids."

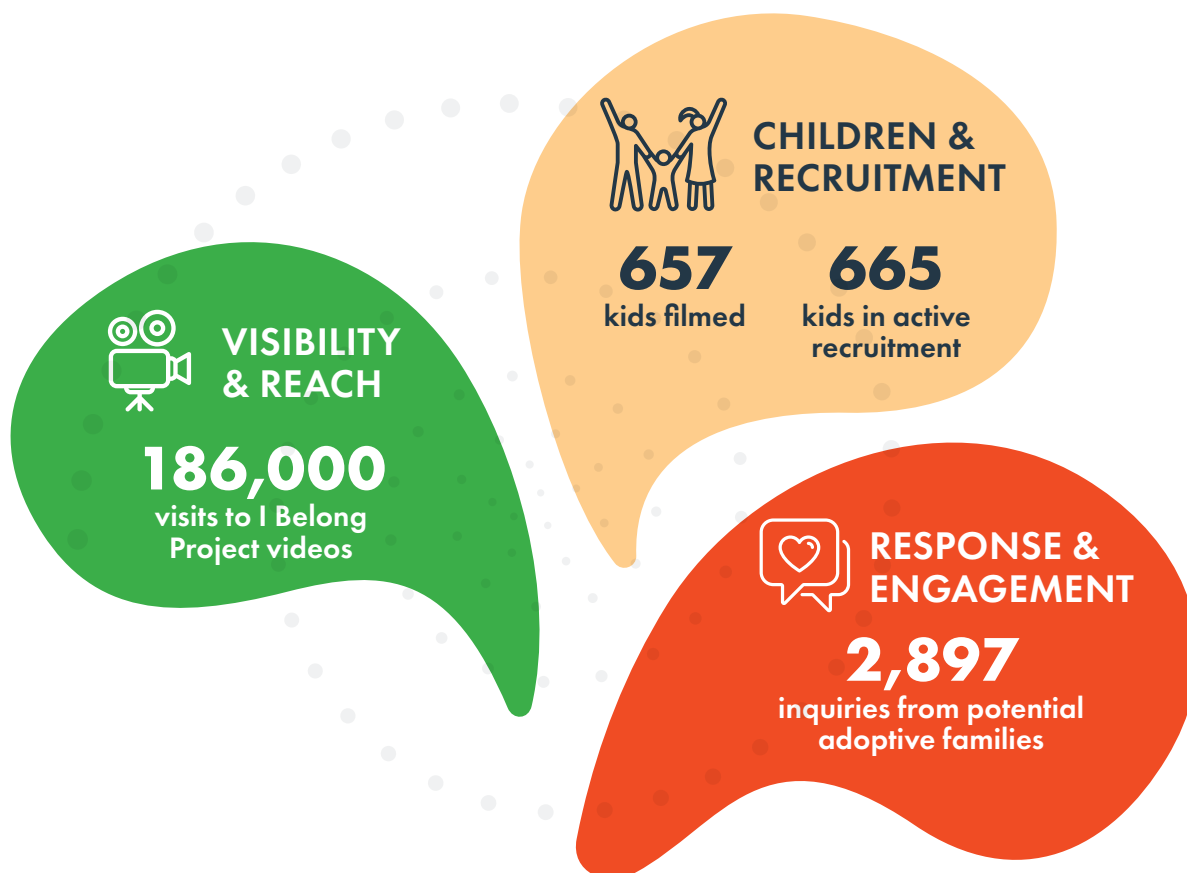
Georgia Moves Hearts To Action

Georgia Kids Belong hosted its third annual Acworth Cares event, bringing Foster Friendly partners together to celebrate and recruit foster parents. Year one revealed that Acworth had no active foster families; this year the community welcomed back families who had begun fostering as a result of Acworth becoming a Foster Friendly Community.

A standout from the night was a Foster Friendly business owner who had committed to help out of care for her community. Through tears she said, "Okay, you've finally broken me down. I'm going to talk to some agencies about fostering."

– Growing Families – I BELONG PROJECT®

The cornerstone of our mission is our I Belong Project, a video storytelling initiative that helps adoption-eligible kids in foster care find belonging with families. Our shoot days create memorable experiences for the kids and show appreciation to the dedicated workers who get them there.



A Family Forms Out Of Brokenness In South Dakota

A mom who adopted a sibling group wrote to South Dakota Kids Belong:

"After several losses, pregnancies that ended too soon and hopeful adoption situations that fell through, we were heartbroken. A social worker who knew our story shared T and C. We were immediately smitten by their smiling faces. The road ahead was paved with tears on both sides; their grief from loss of biological family, abuse and neglect, and ours. But God was at work, knitting together a family that we and the kids had been longing for."

Teen Goes From 0 to 40 In Kansas

We filmed a sweet 15-year-old boy last May who had zero inquiries until he went viral on our national social media platform. In a few days' time he garnered 7.5 million views, 53,000 shares and 40 inquiries! Along the way he captured hearts and inspired many across the world.

I Belong Project is a registered trademark of America's Kids Belong



IBP Inspires 30 New Foster Families In Kentucky.

We filmed 101 kids at three events. Two kids garnered 90 inquiries, 30 of whom were new to fostering. The potential of 30 new foster families is super exciting.

Child Finds Hope In South Dakota

We filmed a young girl in 2024 who had some significant physical and mental disabilities, which could make her harder to place, but she had a story of hope. She was in the program 417 days. She only received seven inquiries, but she got matched with a single mom and the adoption is in the process of being finalized.

IBP Takes To The Ice In Tennessee

Tennessee hosted another IBP shoot with the National Predators NHL team. The kids were invited to skate with the players. It was really cool to see them come off of the ice feeling bolder and proud of themselves for trying something new.

Teen Holds Onto Hope In Georgia

Kelsey had already experienced several failed matches when she was invited to our video shoot. Because it was with a sports team she loves, she said yes to coming, but no to participating. Sitting at a table with her case manager, head down, this professional player walked over and played Connect Four with her. Afterward, her case manager said, 'Okay, you've had a pretty magical day, what do you say we just give this a try?' Kelsey did one of the most beautiful videos ever. And now she is going to be adopted after being on our list for a very long time.

Virginia National Adoption Month Media Campaign

For national adoption month Virginia's Kids Belong coordinated a marketing campaign, with three TV stations and K 102 radio featuring 40 kids in 30 days. Our Richmond station reported 4.4 million views of their social media posts and 34,000 engagements, which is just unbelievable. The campaign generated 200+ inquiries during National Adoption Awareness Month in November.

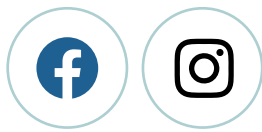
4 WAYS YOU CAN HELP

America's Kids Belong is grateful for your commitment to serve kids and families involved in foster care. Learn how you can get involved:



Listen & Learn

And give us a five-star rating and positive review to help us reach more people!



Share Our Videos

Share our I Belong Project videos to help more kids find families!



Become Foster Friendly

Download the app, and give a five-star rating too, while you're at it!



Give

Support the mission.



americaskidsbelong.org