



KENOSHA NEWS



Providing Hope Through Foster Family Support Network

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Many in local faith communities dedicate their lives to helping the most vulnerable — from the working poor to the homeless to children in foster care.

The foster and adoptive community desperately needs the community. And they need the community to understand children from hard places and the unique joys and challenges when parenting them.

Last February 1HOPE, a local nonprofit organization launched with a mission to focus neighborhood, professional and faith-based energy to restore hope and transform lives.

Journey Church provided initial startup capital so 1HOPE could be formed as an independent nonprofit that mobilizes the neighborhood, professional, and faith-based community.

Kenosha Churches Unite

The movement began in 2013 when over 30 Kenosha churches worked together at a Convoy of Hope event.

Based on their success and mutual goals, Nicole Thomsen, executive director of 1HOPE, said they decided to collaborate and work towards the common purpose of restoring hope and transforming lives in the Kenosha community.

The 1HOPE Foster Family Support Network (FFSN) of volunteers, in partnership with Kenosha County DCFS & Community Impact Programs (CIP), assists licensed foster families to provide services to help alleviate some of the stresses of foster families' daily lives, to ensure the best possible outcomes and experience for foster children.

“Whether it is having a volunteer take care of physical labor jobs around the house or having a monetary donation to help with grocery or gas costs or even having a night of babysitting, these services would allow the foster families to maintain a healthy environment without an overabundance of stress or worry, increasing their likelihood to re-license and continue to support the foster children in our communities,” Thomsen said.

“We believe by providing the opportunities for volunteers to engage with foster children and families, we are assisting in the retention of foster homes as well as assist in the recruitment of new licensed foster homes, knowing that the Foster Family Support Network will be there to support them as well.”





Foster Parent Need

The need for foster parents in Kenosha County continues to grow with the number of children in foster care increasing by 40 percent in the past four years, from a total of 180 children in foster care or treatment foster homes in 2016 to a projected total of 252 by the end of the year.

Additionally, in the past two years, an average of 21 percent of licensed general foster homes chose not to renew their foster care licenses in Kenosha County.

“This decision to not renew can be due to various factors, some of which are positive,” said Thomsen. “An example would be a home that is now at capacity due to adoption. Some closure decisions are also due to changing family circumstances. Examples could include a need to move out of Kenosha County or the need to care for additional family members. However, it is believed that some of these closures could be prevented with additional support from our 1HOPE FFSN. Examples of this could be families who felt overwhelmed by the foster care process, families that lacked enough interpersonal support during their cases, or families whose own children had difficulty adjusting to fostering.”

Between 2016 and 2018, there was a 38 percent decrease in the number of newly licensed homes.



Recruiting Foster Homes

As the need for additional licensed foster homes remains, 1HOPE seeks to assist in recruiting additional homes in partnership with Kenosha County DCFS and Community Impact Programs (CIP). Nationally, the need for foster homes echoes Kenosha County and is on the increase as well; the primary reason for entering foster care was neglect, followed by parental drug use.

“Every child that enters the foster care system needs a loving, safe home. As of July 2020, we have 39 percent of children ages 5 to 11 and 35 percent ages 0 to 4 and the remainder are over the age of 12. There are more males than females,” explained Thomsen.

The 1HOPE FFSN are currently sponsoring 14 foster families representing 26 foster children. Some of the support offered to them include providing Level 1 volunteers to assist with meals, notes of encouragement and purchase of goods needed for the child. Level 2 volunteers help with babysitting, mentoring, tutoring and transportation.

“We are in the intake process to add several more foster families as we speak and continue to add additional foster families on an ongoing rolling basis,” said Thomsen. “Recently, 1HOPE was one of the United Way of Kenosha County’s COVID-19 Relief Grant recipients. We used those funds to launch our ‘Tote of HOPE’ initiative, which blessed 23 foster families, 38 foster children, and 154 family members with a tote filled with family-fun activities, gift cards, and other goods and encouragement to show foster families they are loved and deeply appreciated.”



More Volunteers Sought

Thomsen said they are looking for more volunteers to serve the foster families in the community as well as additional funding to remain an efficient and reliable resource for foster families.

“To bless foster families with goods and services, we are looking to build up a pool of in-kind support services from community business partners to bless these families,” she said. “Foster children are some of the most vulnerable children in our community. When I reflect and try to understand the transition, fear, and uncertainty they may feel, it breaks my heart.”

“When I read Jesus’s words spoken in Mark 10:14 ‘But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God,’ I understand to my core that each of these children has inherent and intrinsic worth, they have a purpose and a future. If we can offer hope to foster children and the foster families who so selflessly open their homes and hearts, we are putting our faith in action.”

Learn more at www.1HOPE.community