


# The Child Welfare Initiative: Connecting Healthy Families with Vulnerable Children

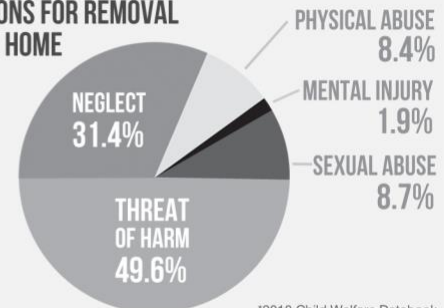
## THE STATE OF CHILD WELFARE IN THE PORTLAND METRO AREA

**4,672** CHILDREN SPENT AT LEAST 1 DAY IN FOSTER CARE IN WASHINGTON, MULTNOMAH, AND CLACKAMAS COUNTIES.  **1,640** CERTIFIED FOSTER HOMES

 THERE ARE 1200 CHURCHES IN THE PORTLAND METRO AREA. AND AN ESTIMATED 110,000 EVANGELICALS. 

\*2010 Child Welfare Databook and Kevin Palau

## REASONS FOR REMOVAL FROM HOME



\*2010 Child Welfare Databook

## BACKGROUND

Over the last year, key leaders in the faith-based communities of Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington counties have shared a passion to serve the child welfare system. In March 2012, a team of leaders began dreaming about the formation a regional collaborative to ensure the long-term sustainability of what is now called the Child Welfare Initiative. Several local churches initially mobilized with a commitment to thinking collectively while sharing ideas. Welcome Boxes have been distributed, beautification work is taking place at local Department of Human Services (DHS) offices, and open dialogue is flowing between ten child welfare agencies and 37 faith communities. Those involved have realized the growing sense that God is asking the regional faith community to do something big, coordinated, and aligned. The overarching goal? **To serve the child welfare system by connecting healthy families to vulnerable children. We aim to dramatically increase the number of foster families by encouraging Christ-following families to engage.**

## THE NEED FOR HEALTHY FAMILIES

Every year in Oregon, over 13,000 children spend at least one day in some form of foster care. Many of these children experience an extended stay through multiple placements in the protection of the Oregon DHS. The reality is that DHS is currently funded at about 66% of what the agency needs to provide quality services to the children in their care. But more than additional resources, fresh office furniture, or bigger budgets, DHS officials at all levels agree the single greatest need in the state is: **a larger population of healthy families certified to provide safe, loving, and supportive homes for Oregon's vulnerable children.**

In the Portland metro area that includes Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington counties, the number of foster care families is 592, not including relative foster care providers. At any point in time, there are 3,143 children in foster care throughout the three counties. A shortage in the number of foster homes results in:

- Inadequate placement of children based on individual needs and foster family skills
- Splitting of children from sibling groups
- Poor blending of behavioral needs amongst foster children placed in the same house
- Overloaded and over-stressed foster families
- Less services and visitation for each child

What would this situation look like if the problem were reversed? Envision a world with a *waiting list of foster families*—loving homes, well-equipped and able to accommodate children in crisis, anxiously waiting for their turn to serve. Imagine DHS employees having the luxury of choosing among qualified families to find just the right match for each child or sibling group depending on their unique circumstances and needs. With double the number of foster families, DHS would have an abundance of healthy families to choose among for every placement, decreasing the instances of disruptive placements, overtaxed foster families, and overworked social workers. What if the local faith community stepped up together to meet the needs of the children in our area?

### **THE VALUE OF A BACKBONE ORGANIZATION**

Local churches have asked Portland Leadership Foundation (PLF) to help align the effort of the faith-based communities in Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington counties behind one voice and one overarching objective. PLF is in the process of creating a backbone organization to help empower, organize, resource, and create a non-competitive, regional effort to support DHS and the families they serve. The backbone model comes from recent research published by the Stanford Social Innovation Review that builds a case for a new form of collaboration called Collective Impact.<sup>1</sup> For Collective Impact to take place, a backbone organization should facilitate five key functions for success: a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforced activities, continuous communication, and backbone support.

The backbone organization will coordinate all partners—churches, DHS offices, private and non-profit organizations, civic leaders, and more—to form an effective regional response, facilitate the sharing of best practices, and measure long-term impact. The backbone organization’s initial priorities will be assigned by an appointed council of leaders who represent key partners (see: Child Welfare Initiative Council). Regardless of size and resources, any church that wishes to support the child welfare system has a role to play. Unity, not conformity, is the goal. Embracing the differences and unique gifts among churches, the backbone organization can help identify the best way for churches to become involved based on resources and potential impact. The backbone organization will help create the structure, support, and measurement system to sustain the effort over time.

### **HOW WILL WE MEASURE SUCCESS?**

If the long-term vision is to create a region-wide network of healthy sustainable foster families that follow Jesus and are ready to serve vulnerable children, how will we measure success? A key component of the collective impact model involves shared measurement. What might this look like? One outcome

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<sup>1</sup> *Channeling Change*, Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2012

should be an increase in the number of the faith-based families that are certified to be foster families and even potentially adoptive families. ***In partnership with DHS, we have identified a “stretch goal” to recruit an additional 884 foster families in the region.*** Additionally, we plan on measuring how other activities affect child placement-related outcomes as the faith community facilitates Foster Parent Night Out, provides short and long-term respite care for foster families, builds Welcome Boxes (over 4,000 needed each year), and facilitates DHS office, lobby, and visitation room beautification.

## **HOW WE’VE ASKED CHURCHES TO GET INVOLVED**

Our strategy is to ask faith communities to get involved at the levels of ***exposure, experience, and engagement.*** Initial exposure could include simple, yet powerful acts such as building Welcome Boxes (a collection of age appropriate activities, snacks, and security items that help calm a child during the anxiety ridden placement process within a DHS office) or helping to beautify DHS waiting areas, lobbies, and offices. Deeper experience involves supporting a Foster Parent Night Out program, where churches provide safe locations with fun activities for foster families to enjoy a night out together. Finally, engagement means providing education and support for families within the faith-based community that are interested in or actively providing foster or respite care and adoption.

We have seen dozens of churches get involved at some level (42 churches so far!).

What started with a stream of ideas has turned into a flood of involvement.

**We’re focused on the number: 884.**

## **What is “884?”**

Despite efforts to try and keep them in their original homes, new children enter foster care every day in the Portland Metro area. Hundreds of these children, especially those without relatives who can care for them, find themselves on the outside of a safe and loving family environment. There is a crisis shortage of foster homes, and many children entering care are traumatically separated from their siblings because there's only a single opening in many foster homes. Other children are placed in homes that are overcrowded or not a good match. The state desires to serve children well, but in order to do so, there must be enough safe and loving families willing to engage with Child Welfare. We have asked DHS Child Welfare in the

Portland Metro area (Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington Counties) how many new non-relative foster care families are needed in order to ensure the right placement match for kids coming into state custody.

That number?

**884.**

We need 884 new, DHS certified (non-relative) foster families to ensure there's a safe and loving family for all of our community's vulnerable children in foster care. Our dream is for families, connected and supported through their faith community, to step into the gap of caring for these children. 884 represents social workers no longer scrambling for placements, the hope of siblings staying together, and mutual transformation of children receiving a chance to thrive and families impacted by caring for them.

***If you are interested in learning more about becoming a certified foster parent, please contact the specific DHS supervisor for your county below and mention “884”.***

Portland Leadership Foundation and Department of Human Services Child Welfare desire to track the inquiries, applications and certifications coming from “884”.

**Multnomah:** Norene Owens/ [Norene.owens@state.or.us](mailto:Norene.owens@state.or.us)/ 503-872-5563

**Clackamas:** Dan Minne/ [Dan.minne@state.or.us](mailto:Dan.minne@state.or.us)/ 503-731-3456

**Washington:** Scott Noon/ [Scott.noon@state.or.us](mailto:Scott.noon@state.or.us)/ 503-681-6998