

Engagement in US Foster Care and Adoption

2025 DATA AND TRENDS



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Acknowledgements

CAFO would like to thank the many leaders and advocates in the CAFO community whose wisdom and experiences helped inform the questions on this survey, and the team at Pinkston for their excellent work conducting the study and sharing it with the public.

Where did this data come from?

The data in this report flows from a study conducted by Pinkston, a leading communications and research agency. In March 2025, Pinkston conducted an online survey on behalf of CAFO with a sample of 1,515 U.S. adults, ages 18 and older, and 64.9% identifying as Christian. The overall margin of error for responses is 2.5%.



Dear Friend,

We're so glad to share with you these first-of-their-kind insights into Americans' views and experiences related to foster care, adoption and family support.

The data is drawn from more than 1,500 participants – with much thanks to the work of the CAFO team and our excellent research partners at Pinkston.

We trust it will help boost the precision and positive impact of your work, from well-calibrated messaging to targeted support services.

We hope the findings will also refresh your confidence that our faith makes a world of difference. Faith-based organizations enjoy unique levels of public trust and Christians actively foster, adopt, give, volunteer, mentor and more at significantly higher rates. We have a great foundation to build on.

Perhaps most profoundly, and in contrast to some common narratives, we see that adoption and fostering is highly associated with the flourishing of families over time. While the difficulties can be immense, families who adopt and/or foster tend to do remarkably well in the long run – indeed, notably more so than families who don't.

The work will never be easy, of course. But like the Apostle Paul, we pray that “your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight” (NIV). As it does, we have no doubt that God will continue to multiply your faithful service to achieve more than we could ask or imagine.

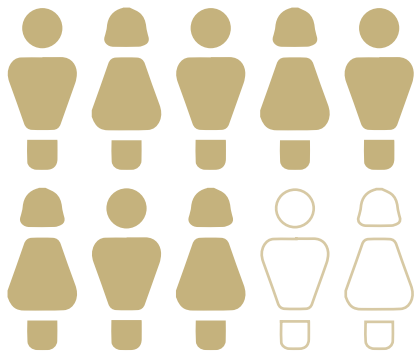
A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Jedd Medefind". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J" and a prominent "M".

JEDD MEDEFIND

The Christian Alliance for Orphans

Highlights: Foster Care and Adoption Engagement

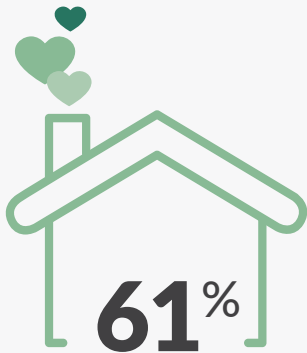
A glimpse of where we are in 2025 and what it means for your work.



78%

of Americans simply haven't seriously explored fostering or adopting.

In your work, you can find them, understand what motivates them, and help them overcome their barriers to engagement.



61%

of people who have seriously explored foster care and/or adoption were motivated by providing a loving home for a child in need (far above any other reason).

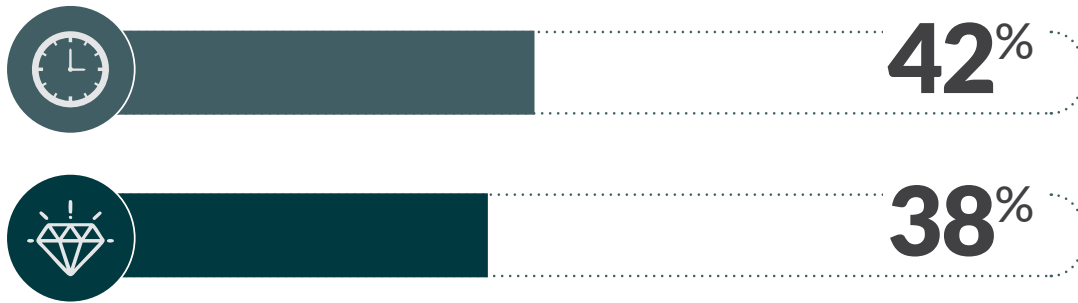
You can build connection through stories, which motivate people more than overwhelming numbers or information.



42%

of people said that financial capacity was a major barrier.

You can ensure people have accurate information through simple messaging about finances in interest meetings or recruitment campaigns to help reduce this barrier in foster care and adopting from foster care.



The top two reasons people gave for not being involved in alternative ways were lack of time (42%) and feeling they didn't have anything meaningful to offer (38%).

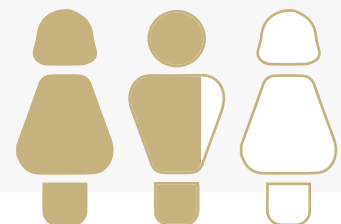
You can help people “connect the dots” to ways their gifts and skills – and simply their time and caring attention – can make a world of difference for children and families as they leverage what they are already doing, whether as a church leader, business owner, etc.



Faith-based nonprofits are America's most trusted institutions when it comes to serving children and families in the foster care system.

People trust faith-based nonprofits to “do the right thing for kids and families in the foster care system” more than any other institution.

And nearly two out of three people said they want to see churches more involved in supporting vulnerable children and families.



*Your work matters,
and Americans largely
welcome and invite you to keep
pressing into serving
your neighbors through
foster care and adoption!*



PART ONE

Engagement in Foster and Adoptive Parenting



Foster and Adoptive Parenting: By the Numbers

Based on this data, how many people have fostered or adopted — or have seriously explored it?

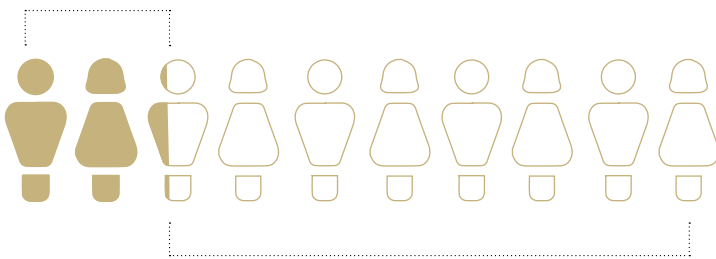


3.1% of Americans have adopted.



2.6% of Americans have fostered.
(and some of them have done both!)

Overall, **22%** of the general population have seriously explored either fostering, adoption or both.



The large majority of Americans simply haven't seriously explored fostering or adopting — **78%**

There is a large pool of people in your community who simply haven't seriously considered it, and finding them with the right message and next step to start engaging is key.



Christians Are More Likely to Foster or Adopt

Christians are much more likely to foster or adopt than their non-believing neighbors. Compared to those who are Agnostic, Atheist or No Faith, Christians are more likely to have adopted (nearly 2X) or to have fostered (more than 3X). This holds true in relation to other faiths also, with Christians having adopted or fostered nearly twice as often.



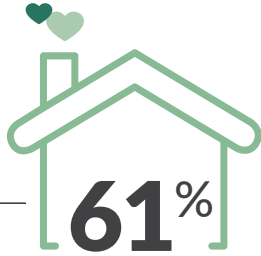
Christians are **2x** more likely to adopt.



Christians are **3x** more likely to foster.

The Motives of Foster or Adoptive Parents

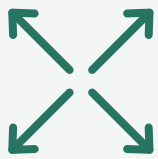
For people who have seriously explored foster care or adoption, what motivated them?



61% of those who have seriously explored foster care or adoption were motivated by providing a loving home for a child in need (far above any other reason).

Even for Christians, providing a loving home was the most frequently stated motivation, significantly above faith as a stated motivation.

The next most common motives were:



33% desired to expand their family.



30% were inspired by their faith to care for the vulnerable.



We have every reason to lean into telling compelling stories to invite people into foster care and adoption. While we don't want our communications to gloss over the challenging realities of foster care and adoption, people are most motivated by the desire to help a child in need and the impact that is possible.

Men and Women Lean toward Different Motivations



Compared to women, **men who have seriously explored fostering or adopting are more likely to have been motivated by having a close friend or family member experiencing foster care or adoption.**



Relative to men, **women who have seriously explored fostering or adopting are more likely to have been motivated by providing a loving home to a child in need.**

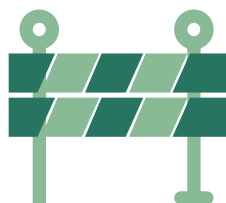


This may reflect a need to engage men more experientially, including seeing others in their lives foster and adopt, while women are more likely to be able to engage empathetically through stories and information.



The Barriers to Foster or Adoptive Parenting

What are the barriers keeping people from fostering or adopting?



Respondents cited financial capacity, general disinterest and the lack of space in their home as the top barriers.

42%



Financial capacity

28%



Lack of interest

23%



Lack of space

Equip people with clear, simple information about finances in interest meetings or recruitment campaigns to help reduce this barrier. Even for people who had seriously explored fostering or adopting, finances were the top concern. While this barrier might be rooted in questions about the insufficiency of state stipends or the unknown future costs of care (child care, healthcare, education, basic needs, extracurriculars, etc.), it's also possible that people are assuming costs to foster care or adoption from foster care that do not actually exist.



What isn't a barrier to fostering or adopting?

Based on stories and observations from the CAFO community, we asked questions about two things we thought might be barriers to fostering adopting, but instead, they turned out to be a helpful doorway.



Working from Home Makes It Easier:

While home offices often take up a bedroom – potentially limiting capacity to foster or adopt – flexible work arrangements polled as making it “more feasible” to foster or adopt.

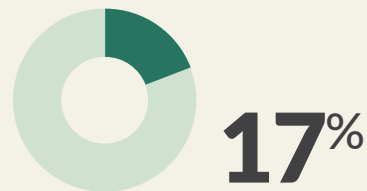


of those who have fostered or adopted (or those who have seriously explored it) and have remote or flex work believe this work format makes it more feasible to foster or adopt (compared to 55% overall).



Seeing the Realities of Foster Care and Adoption Up Close Draws People In:

Seeing the highs and lows of friends or family who have fostered and adopted motivates people to foster or adopt more often than it makes people hesitant.



of respondents said observing others made them more likely to foster or adopt, compared to 8% who said it made them less likely. (The rest were neutral, unsure or didn't know anyone who had fostered or adopted.)



Connect people directly to foster or adoptive families through wrap-around support or other forms of service, which might help close the gap and lead them into foster care and adoption themselves.

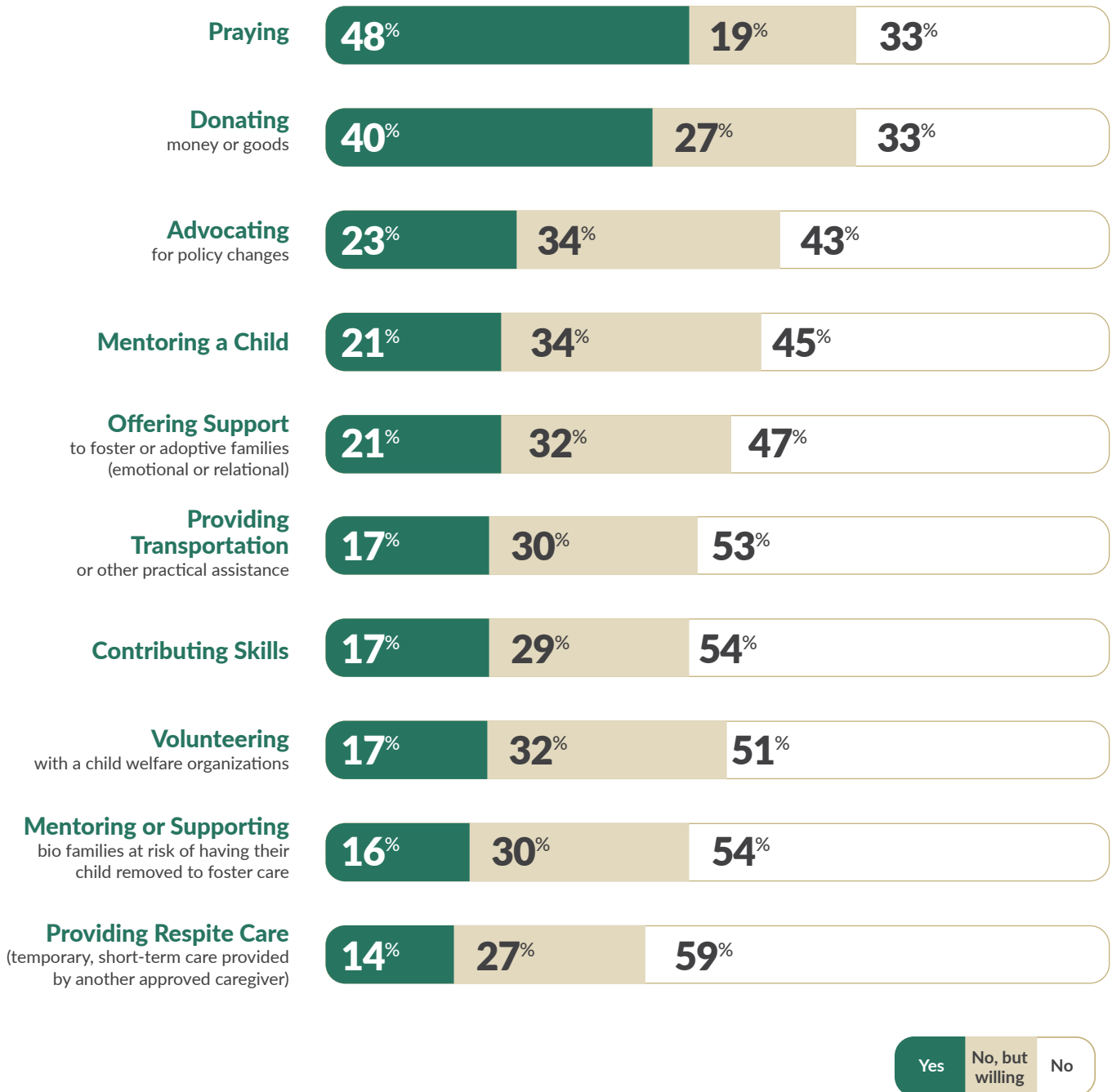
PART TWO

Alternative Ways of Supporting Foster Care and Adoption



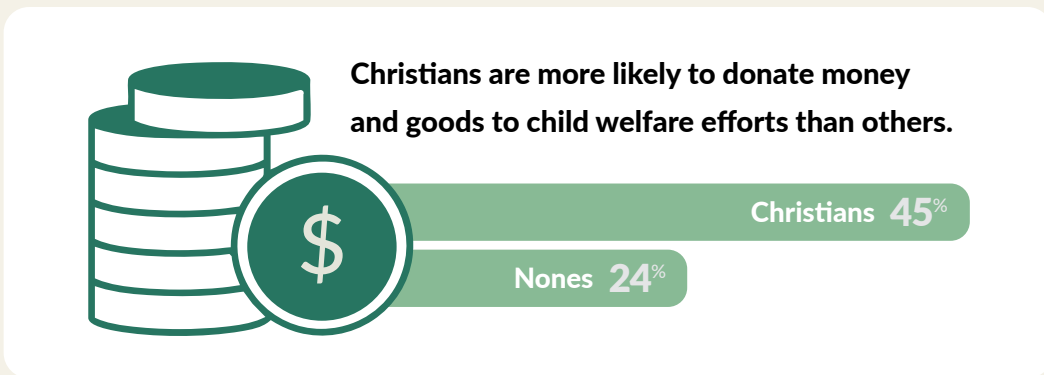
Alternative Ways of Support: By the Numbers

The majority of respondents are interested in (or currently are) supporting foster care and adoption in ways besides being foster or adoptive parents.

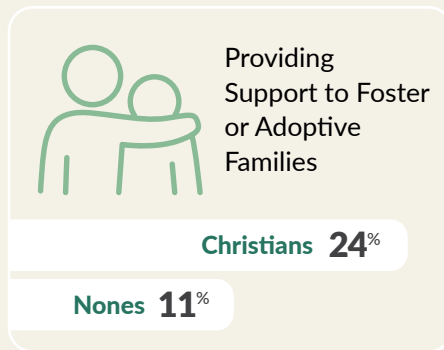


Christians are more likely to engage in alternative ways of support.

In every measured category, Christians are more likely to support foster care and adoption through alternative ways than those who are Atheist, Agnostic or No Faith (Nones).



Christians engage in hands-on service at a higher rate than others.



Christians are also more likely to engage in other ways of serving, including:

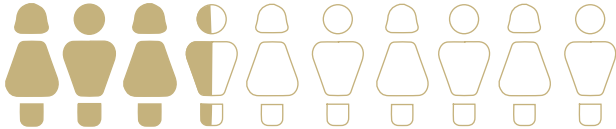
- Contributing Skills**
- Advocating for Policy Change**
- Providing Respite Care**



Further, the more seriously a Christian takes their faith, the more likely he or she is to do all of these things.

The Barriers to Alternative Ways of Support

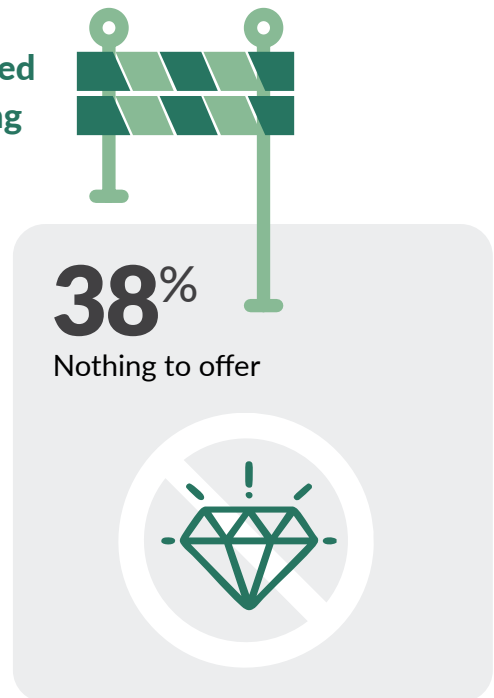
What's keeping people from engaging in these alternative ways of supporting foster care and adoption?



35%

of people said they were not involved in any alternative ways of supporting foster care and adoption.

The top two reasons people gave for not being involved were lack of time and feeling they didn't have anything meaningful to offer.



On some level, people listing “time” as their top barrier reflects decisions about their individual priorities and values. But we also need to help people see how they can integrate supporting children and families into what they are already doing, whether as a church ministry leader, business owner, etc. — and we need to help them “connect the dots” to see how those contributions are meaningful.



PART THREE

Additional Highlights



Perceptions of Faith-Based Institutions

Faith-based nonprofits are the most trusted institutions when it comes to serving children and families in the foster care system.



People trust faith-based nonprofits to “do the right thing for kids and families in the foster care system” more than any other institution.

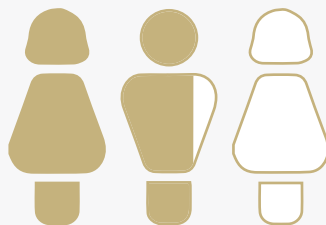
People with direct experience in foster care or adoption hold even stronger trust in faith-based nonprofits, at more than

60%



Americans want to see churches more involved in supporting vulnerable children and families.

Nearly two out of three people said they want to see churches more involved in supporting vulnerable children and families.



Despite experiences that might lead faith-based institutions to feel pressure to retreat from the foster care space, there is welcome and invitation from most Americans to keep pressing into serving our neighbors in these ways.



Family Flourishing

Families that have fostered and/or adopted are generally flourishing more than other families, even as they do hard things.

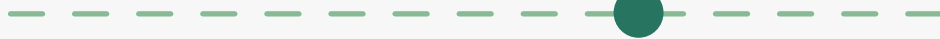
Sometimes conversations in the foster care and adoption space imply that foster and adoptive families will not thrive due to the unique struggles brought by children coming from difficult backgrounds. This data reveals precisely the opposite.



19% of foster and adoptive families say they are flourishing. This makes them more than twice as likely to report that they are “flourishing” compared to families who haven’t (7%).

We see a near inversion of these figures when we look at the worst category of self-reported wellbeing, “Struggling.” **While 16% of families who’ve not fostered or adopted put themselves in this category, only 4% of foster and adoptive families say the same.**

The large majority of families surveyed — and likely many of us — said they were somewhere in between struggling and flourishing.



That doesn't mean adoptive and foster families haven't faced immense difficulties. Most have, and many still do.

Yet despite these painful experiences, adoptive and foster families are much more likely to look at their lives and say they are flourishing than those who have not fostered or adopted.

Whatever the means, it appears clear that the self-giving and welcome at the heart of adoption and foster care contribute greatly to the flourishing of families in the long run.



Advocates for foster care and adoption must always speak frankly about the great challenges that foster and adoptive families often face. But we can also speak with confidence in an even deeper truth of Scripture:

“ . . . [S]uffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame . . . ”

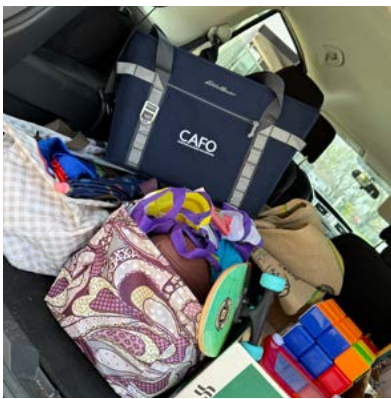
(Romans 5:3-5, NIV)

Epilogue





A Peek Behind the Scenes



The Ones Column

When we look at foster care and adoption data, our strong inclination is to look for big numbers, the starkest trends and the insights that will help us reshape our strategic plans and scale our work.

This report includes numbers, graphs and information designed to help you do just that.

But the why matters.

Together, let's remain grounded in the ones column. **The individual children and families in your community are why this data matters, and their stories and experiences are unique and don't always align with trends or patterns.**

To that end, the photos used in this guide are all from a CAFO-coordinated photoshoot near Dayton, Ohio, with real foster and adoptive families. And the five photographers involved each gave their time and passion to see children and families in their community — and across the US — thrive.

The images themselves speak to the type of engagement we long for where we live: a culture where children and families in foster care are seen and celebrated by a community who truly believes that everyone can do something on their behalf.

So let's move forward — together — equipped with data to inform our work serving the real, individual children and families in front of us.



About CAFO

The Christian Alliance for Orphans (CAFO) unites almost 300 respected organizations and a global network of churches to inspire and equip Christians to effectively answer God's call to care for vulnerable children and families. Since 2004, CAFO members have sought to "leave their logos and egos at the door" to join in shared initiatives to grow and guide effective responses for the world's most vulnerable children, from foster care and adoption to family strengthening and care for vulnerable children worldwide. CAFO is a 501c3 non-profit organization headquartered in McLean, Virginia. To learn more visit cafo.org.

Go Deeper with

MORE TH>N ENOUGH

More Than Enough, CAFO's US Foster Care Initiative, is a community of churches, organizations and advocates working toward a shared vision of more than enough for children and families before, during and beyond foster care. The More Than Enough Team at CAFO strengthens the Community with practical tools and resources, aiming to see well-supported families for every child in foster care – including foster, kinship, adoptive and biological families. Learn more and get involved at cafo.org/morethanenough.



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