



Weekend Miracles Welcome Packet



Weekend Miracles Program

KIDSAVE®

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Letter from Director of Family Visit Programs

Dear Friend,

Thank you for your interest in the Kidsave® Los Angeles Weekend Miracles® program. Kidsave Los Angeles Weekend Miracles, a partnership between Kidsave and the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, provides a new way to find adoptive parents for older foster youth. The purpose of this creative program is to get older foster youth out of the child welfare system and into permanent families, or at the very least, connected to a caring, stable adult, called a “host”. Children participating in Weekend Miracles become visible to the community through weekend visits with their “host” family. Host families partner with the children to help them find the permanent families they need.

There are many ways that you can be involved in the program. Some of the volunteer opportunities include hosting a child, advocating for a child, helping recruit families, fundraising, and organizing weekend events.

We have included the following materials in this Welcome Packet to familiarize you with our program and share with you ways that you can get involved:

- n Overview of Kidsave Los Angeles Weekend Miracles
- n What does it take to be a Weekend Miracles Host Parent document
- n Questions and Answers about the Weekend Miracles Program
- n Diagram – How the Weekend Miracles Program Works
- n Kidsave Fact Sheet - information about Kidsave’s mission and programs

Please contact us if you have any questions at (310) 642-7283 or Kidsave’s toll free number 1-888-Kidsave (888-543-7283). Or you can email us at weekendmiracles@kidsave.org.

Please remember to regularly visit our website www.kidsave.org to obtain program updates and information on upcoming Weekend Miracles events and meetings.

We look forward to your participation in the program.

Many thanks,

Lauren Reicher Gordon
VP/Director of Family Visit Programs

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Kidsave's Los Angeles Weekend Miracles program

Kidsave's Weekend Miracles program is a partnership with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services. Weekend Miracles provides children who have a plan for adoption with the opportunity to spend weekends with host families who help advocate for each child's adoption. The program's goal is to introduce children to families who might be interested in adopting them, and to find each child in the program a permanent, adoptive family or a connected relationship with at least one caring adult. The program is modeled in part after Kidsave's Summer Miracles Program.

The mission of Kidsave®, a nonprofit organization with offices in the District of Columbia and Los Angeles, is to create change so that older, forgotten orphanage and foster kids grow up in families and connected to caring adults. Kidsave believes that every child needs and deserves a family. Since 1999, Kidsave's Summer Miracles Program has placed more than 1,700 children (ages 5 to 16) from Russian, Kazakhstan, and Colombian orphanages with American families for summer visits. Permanent homes have been found for over 80% of the children available for adoption.

Remarkably, about 50 percent of the host families in the international program decide to actually adopt children. This phenomenon is similar to the experience of Los Angeles County's foster care and adoption program, where about 50 percent of the children placed for adoption are adopted by their foster parents.

Despite considerable efforts, there are children in County foster care for whom no adoptive family can be found. Of the more than 500 Los Angeles County children currently waiting for adoptive homes, the majority are older African American and Latino children. Nationally as well as locally, African American children are over-represented in the foster care population. Moreover, children from the Latino community are now the largest and fastest growing ethnic group in Los Angeles County's Foster Care System.

The physical and emotional toll that the lack of a permanent home places on a child is significant. These children are more likely to have delays in growth, learning disabilities, and psychological problems. Many do not graduate from high school but, rather, go on welfare or become homeless.

Weekend Miracles offers a new model for finding adoptive families for harder-to-place children. Typically, a prospective adoptive parent must make a commitment to adopt a particular child before having the opportunity to meet with the child. The new approach being implemented with the Weekend Miracles program involves physically placing children on weekends with volunteer host families so that potential permanent parents have the opportunity to meet the children. This exposure allows for bonds to be created naturally without the pressure of having to commit to adopting a child before becoming acquainted with that child.



Kidsave's Los Angeles Weekend Miracles program

Weekend Miracles brings together the marketing expertise of Kidsave and the social work assessment and child placement skills of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services. Kidsave is responsible for community outreach for the program. We continue to build a local coalition by contacting businesses and associations and asking them to become corporate sponsors for fundraising and volunteers. In addition, Kidsave seeks to engage the support of Los Angeles County community leaders, local and federal elected officials, the media, and celebrities for the Kidsave/Los Angeles Weekend Miracles Program. Kidsave is working to form relationships in minority communities and to provide information to engage interested people as hosts, mentors, and advocates.

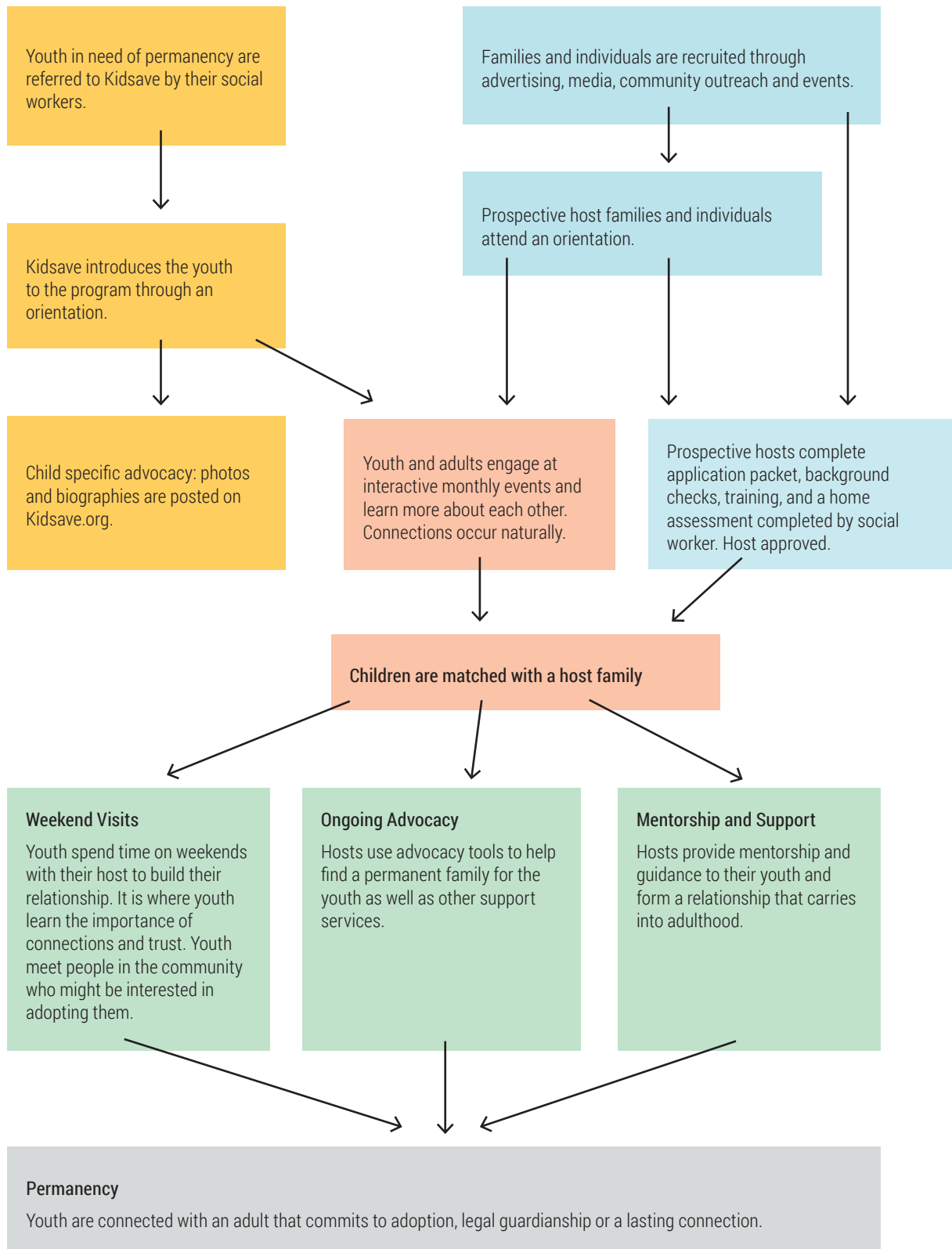
The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is responsible for preparing the children for recruitment, adoption, and the Weekend Miracles experience. The Department is also responsible for assisting in host recruitment and the approval of host families. In addition, DCFS makes all decisions related to host family placement, adoptive placement and finalization of adoption. DCFS monitors the weekend placements, and provides ongoing support to the children and host families.

Foster Family Agencies participate by referring children and families they feel are appropriate for the program.

The desired outcomes of Kidsave's Weekend Miracles Program are to demonstrate that face-to-face exposure to children in foster care will increase adoptions, shorten the time a child spends in foster care, and demonstrate that citizen advocates are important in ensuring that all children find permanent families.



How the Weekend Miracles® program works



Kidsave's Weekend Miracles FAQs

What is Kidsave Los Angeles Weekend Miracles?

Kidsave Los Angeles Weekend Miracles®, a partnership between Kidsave® and the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, provides a new way to find adoptive parents for older foster youth. The purpose of this program is to successfully place waiting children in adoptive homes by increasing the children's visibility and accessibility to people who can help them find permanent homes. Participating children become visible to the community through weekend visits with host families. Host families partner with the children to help them find permanent families and often become their life-long connection.



How does the Weekend Miracles Program work?

- Children are prepared and prospective hosts are trained and approved for participation in the program.
- Children and prospective hosts are able to meet at monthly advocacy events and get to know each other in a fun, interactive environment.
- A host family is matched with a child they have connected with through the monthly events.
- Host families spend a minimum of 2 days a month with the child, developing a relationship of trust and supporting the child.
- Host families partner with the child to help find the child a permanent family by introducing them to the host's personal networks and community.
- Miracles happen! A family may fall in love with a child and make the commitment to adopt. Others may be inspired to become hosts or advocates for the child. Sometimes host families adopt the child they host.



How are children matched with host families?

Children are matched with host families based on interests and the ages and genders of any children living in the host family's home. The opinion of the children in the program is valued and considered. DCFS social workers are responsible for approving the match, taking into consideration the child and the family's needs.

How does Kidsave select the children who will participate?

Children chosen for the Summer Miracles program are selected based on specific program requirements and are believed to have the ability to benefit from the experience and successfully adapt to family living.

Who are the children participating in Weekend Miracles?

- Children age 9 or older, single children and sibling groups.
- Children living with foster families and in group homes throughout Los Angeles County.
- Children who might have educational, emotional, and/or medical needs.

Who can host?

- Hosts must be at least 24 years old, and can be single, married, divorced or separated.
- Hosts must be in good health; able to actively parent the host child.
- No member of the host household can have a conviction for any violent crime or a crime against a child. Other types of prior convictions will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.
- The host family's home (house or apartment) must provide a safe environment and include adequate space. A host child may share a bedroom with another child of the same gender. Children of the opposite gender cannot share a bedroom unless both are under the age of five.
- A minimum of one adult host must be a licensed driver in good standing.

What if I decide that I want to adopt the child I am hosting?

Some host parents may decide they are interested in adopting their host child. We are delighted when host parents and children develop such a strong connection. As soon as you think you might be interested in adoption, please let us know. You should not, however, say anything directly to the child. While you will certainly be considered as an adoptive parent as you have built a relationship with the child, there is no guarantee that you will be able to adopt the child you host. The child's social worker has a number of factors to consider when assessing an adoptive family. The host family interested in adopting will need to participate in the adoption home study process through DCFS or, if requested, by a dually licensed Foster Family Agency (FFA).

What kind of support is available for the children and host families participating in Kidsave Los Angeles Weekend Miracles?

- Kidsave staff and DCFS social workers are available to support children and families as needed
- Kidsave responds to all host family "Weekend Reports", submitted after each host visit



What kind of training and support will host families receive?

Host families must complete required training provided by their local agency and Kidsave. Families will receive training materials and resources such as the Host Family Handbook, The Profile of the Older Post-Institutionalized Child, How to Talk to My Host Child About Adoption—Not!, a Child Talk language guide, and a recommended reading list so that they can learn more about the issues a post-institutionalized child might face. While the children are here, families have the support of their local social worker, coordinator, and Kidsave staff. Hosts attend two mandatory support meetings during the program, facilitated by their local coordinator and often an agency social worker. Additionally, families will have access to a resource guide that outlines additional support services.



What does Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services provide?

- Identification of children who participate in the program
- Child preparation and individual support
- Approval of host families
- Social work support to children and families
- Matching and placement services
- Pre- and post-adoption support and financial assistance



What does Kidsave provide?

- Information and outreach to the community and partnerships with civic, social, fraternal, and faith-based organizations
- Planning and implementation of monthly advocacy events to introduce the children to the community
- Publicity about older child adoption
- Recruitment of host families and advocates, and facilitation of host family and advocate training
- Website (www.kidsave.org) featuring Kidsave Los Angeles Weekend Miracles and the participating children
- Fundraising to sustain the program

I'm not sure I am ready to host. Is there some other way I can help?

Most definitely! Weekend Miracles depends on the efforts of many volunteers. Some volunteer opportunities include:

- Advocate by reaching out to your circle of friends, family, and members of your community and co-workers about a specific child that needs a permanent family.
- Volunteer by helping to recruit families, mentors, and other volunteers. Participate in community presentations, publicity, weekend events, transportation and fundraising.
- Donate!

What does it take to be a Weekend Miracles® host?

As a host, your most important role is your commitment to being a stable, caring and consistent connection for the youth that you host. Hosts are volunteers, and as such are often the first people in a foster child's life who are not paid to spend time with that child. Hosts are also asked to partner with Kidsave to advocate on behalf of their host child to help them find a permanent family.

If you decide to host, we are sure you will find hosting to be a rewarding experience. The following is an overview to familiarize you with the hosting process and next steps. We understand that there are many steps to complete before hosting a child. This is because each child is a dependent of the court, and the State of California requires that specific standards be met for a child to stay in a host family's home. Please do not feel overwhelmed...Kidsave will help you through this process!

Host Families will agree to:

- 1 Advocate for the child to find an adoptive family by:
 - n Introducing the child to individuals in the host family's network to find the child a permanent family or a life-long connection;
 - n Taking the child to monthly Weekend Miracles advocacy events and planning additional activities/gatherings where the child can meet adults who are interested in adoption.
- 2 Work with the child's foster parent, Kidsave, and the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services staff.
- 3 Help the host child feel comfortable in the host family home.
- 4 Stay in regular contact with the Kidsave Los Angeles Weekend Miracles staff and submit a Host Family Report after each visit.
- 5 Transport the child back and forth to the host family home for weekend visits and monthly advocacy events.
- 6 Document visits and time spent with the host child by creating and maintaining a photo album.
- 7 Respect the child's boundaries and maintain the child's confidentiality by sharing only information that has been approved for release by the Weekend Miracles social worker and the child.
- 8 Be patient with the child and understand that, for many children, being in foster care is a traumatic experience. This experience will affect how they interact with new people; they will likely need additional time to trust others.

Hosts will need to complete the following steps:

- 1 Attend a Weekend Miracles Orientation.
- 2 Complete and submit the Weekend Miracles Host Application.
- 3 Complete a live scan (background fingerprinting clearances) at a Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services office location.
- 4 Attend 12 hours of Kidsave Los Angeles Weekend Miracles training, which covers information regarding parenting and advocating for a child in foster care. If you have already completed MAPP, PRIDE or similar foster care licensing training, you are encouraged to attend the training, but it is not a requirement. You will be asked to submit a copy of your training completion certificate.
- 5 Attend the two-hour Program and Advocacy Training, offered via online webinar. This training covers important program protocols, the roles and responsibilities of a host, and provides tools and resources to assist host families in their advocacy efforts.
- 6 Submit current copies of your driver's license, vehicle registration and auto insurance.
- 7 TB - All adults and children over the age of three living in the household must have a current (within two year) TB clearance.



- 8 CPR/First Aid training and certification
- 9 Meet with the Department of Children and Family Services social worker for a face-to-face home visit to address your suitability to host and answer any individual questions or concerns you have about being a host parent.
- 10 If you are currently a licensed or certified foster parent, you may qualify to be approved as a “Weekend” host, which means you will automatically be approved for overnight visits with your host child. Those without a foster care license or approved adoption home study will be approved as a “Day” host, which means any overnight visits must be first be approved by the child’s social worker and permission must be given by the caregiver.



About Kidsave

Kidsave's Family Visit Model

The Family Visit Model combines the best practices in social work and family recruiting to place older kids in orphanages and foster care with host families for weekends and school breaks with the goal of finding adoptive families and lasting mentoring relationships. This unique model has been replicated by domestic agencies, foreign governments, and non-profits worldwide.

Kidsave's Family Visit Model programs

- Weekend Miracles: applies the Family Visit Model in the US, placing American foster youth with local families for the weekend
- Summer Miracles: applies the Family Visit Model overseas, placing foreign foster and orphan youth with American families for a summer vacation
- Encuentros Milagrosos: the Family Visit Model working in Colombia to help orphans find families, mentors and receive vocational training
- Kidsave Sierra Leone: incorporates microloans into the Family Visit Model to enable market women to increase their income, giving them the opportunity to host and find permanent families for local orphans

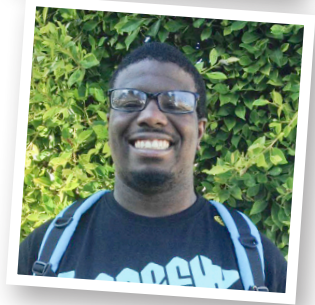
Kidsave's other programs

- Russia Teen Mothers: keeps teen moms from putting their kids into orphanages by teaching them parenting and job skills
- Strong Shoulders: prepares "aging out" teens for independent living and matches them with mentors
- Training the Trainers: creates materials and seminars for child welfare professionals
- Advocacy: promotes global improvements in government policies and practice

About Kidsave

Kidsave is a US-based nonprofit focused on finding families for children the world has forgotten. Kidsave uses its signature Family Visit Model to help kids ages 6-18 in US and overseas foster care systems and orphanages find lasting relationships with caring adults. Without the stability of a family or mentor, statistics show that many of these kids will be victims of negative cycles:

- 10% will commit suicide
- 25% will be parents before age 20
- 30% will be homeless
- 50% will end up in jail
- 50% will be high school dropouts



Key Results

- Over 5,549 foster and orphan youth, more than a dozen governments, and 1,500 professionals have been impacted by Kidsave programs since 1999. Our goal is to accelerate this progress and connect 1 million children to families by 2020.
- Over 1,769 kids have participated in Summer Miracles since 1999, 83% have been adopted or are in the process of being adopted
- 195 kids have participated in Weekend Miracles since 2006, 75% have been adopted or have formed a lasting mentoring relationship
- \$3.3M in direct LA County savings since the implementation of Weekend Miracles