



WEEKEND MIRACLES HOUSTON WELCOME PACKET



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CONTENTS

01. Letter from Director	1
02. Kidsave's Weekend Miracles Houston program	2
03. How the Weekend Miracles program works	3
05. Kidsave's Weekend Miracles Houston FAQs	4-6
04. What does it take to be a Weekend Miracles host?	7

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR OF WEEKEND MIRACLES HOUSTON

Thank you for your interest in the Kidsave® Weekend Miracles® Houston program. Kidsave is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Our mission is to create change so older kids in foster care grow up in families and connected to caring adults. We believe every child needs and deserves a family. Since 1999, Kidsave has directly served more than 14,500 children and helped more than 500,000 kids through our partners around the world.

Our Weekend Miracles program provides a new way to find adoptive families for older children in foster care who are ages 9 to 17. The purpose of this innovative program is to move these children 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 visits with their host family on weekends and during school breaks. Host families advocate for the children to help them find the adoptive families and connections they need. In some cases, host families adopt or become the lasting connection for the child.

There are many ways you can be involved in the program. Some of the volunteer opportunities include hosting a child, advocating for a child, helping to 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 the ways you can get involved:

- Overview of Weekend Miracles Houston
- Diagram – How the Weekend Miracles Program Works
- What does it take to be a Weekend Miracles Host
- Questions and Answers about the Weekend Miracles Program
- Kidsave Overview

Please contact me if you have any questions at (281) 817-6090 or email me at tabitha@kidsave.org.

Kidsave is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in our culture, and especially in our work to help older kids in foster care. We are inclusive with our kids and our hosts are singles and couples, with or without children of any race, ethnicity, religion, or culture. We are LGBTQIA welcoming.

Please remember to regularly visit our website www.kidsave.org to obtain program updates and information on Weekend Miracles Houston events. We look forward to your participation in the program.

Many thanks,

Tabitha Charlton
Director – Weekend Miracles Houston



Kidsave's Weekend Miracles Houston program is a partnership with Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Harris County Protective Services for Children and Adults, and general residential operations, residential treatment centers and child placement agencies throughout the Houston area. We work together to give children in foster care the opportunity to spend weekends with host families who help advocate for each child's adoption. Our program gives these children a voice in their permanency plan and a choice in who they get to know and who may become their adoptive parents. The program's goal is to introduce children to stable, safe, and loving adults to find them a lifelong connection with at least one adult or permanent, adoptive family.

Despite considerable efforts, thousands of children are languishing in foster care with little chance of finding an adoptive family. Of the more than 8,000 in Texas who are waiting for adoptive homes, the majority are older Hispanic and African American children. While children from the Latino community are now the largest and fastest-growing ethnic group in Texas's Foster Care System, African American children are over-represented both nationally and locally and wait the longest for a permanent family.

Children who lack a permanent home suffer a significant physical and emotional toll. Studies show the longer a child remains in the state's permanent managing conservatorship, the less likely they are to exit the system to permanent homes. Nonetheless, thousands of kids spend years in the system, enduring countless moves, rejections, and disruptions, living mostly in institutions with limited access to normalcy. Raised by shift workers, they form few, if any, lasting, stable connections to loving, nurturing adults who will support and guide them toward positive and healthy life choices after they age out.

Peer-reviewed research indicates that children who age out of foster care are more prone to poverty, homelessness, drug abuse, crime, unplanned pregnancy, and mental health problems, and are more likely to become victims of trafficking. Yet, each year, more than 1,500 teens age out of the Texas foster care system with no safe place to turn or transition to extended foster care, where they will eventually exit, alone.

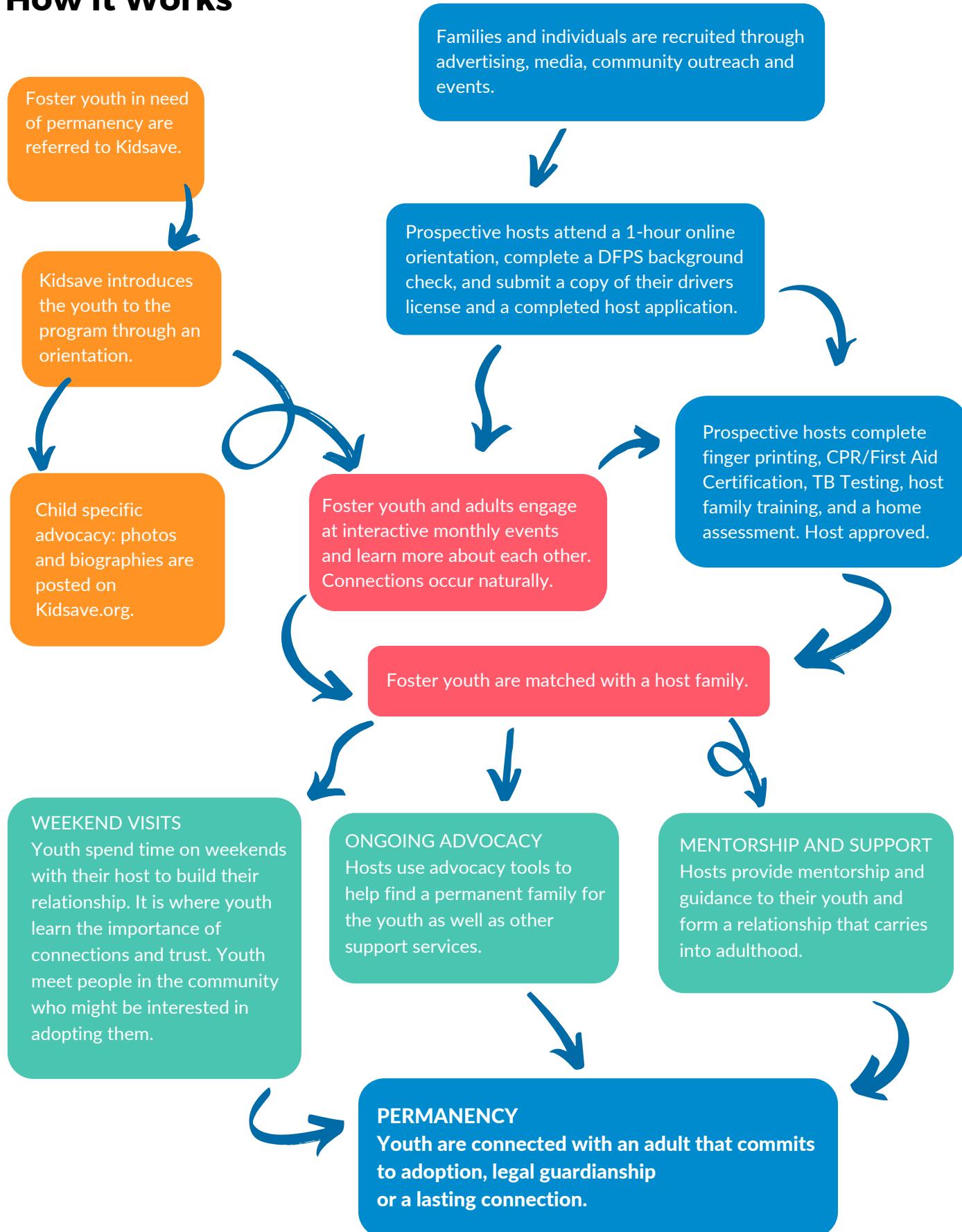
Other long-term effects from their time in foster care include delays in growth, learning disabilities, and psychological problems. Most fall years behind in school, making it difficult to graduate before they age out. As a result, many never graduate from high school and fewer than 3% obtain a four-year college degree by the age of 25.

It doesn't have to be this way.

Weekend Miracles offers a proven child-specific approach for finding adoptive families for harder-to-place children. Traditionally, prospective families are required to commit to fostering or adopting a child before having the opportunity to meet the child. They are also required to make a significant up-front commitment to training and licensing criteria before they even decide if fostering and/or adopting from foster care is right for them.

Kidsave's proprietary approach involves introducing kids to volunteer hosts at events specifically designed to give them opportunities to meet and interact with as many potential families and hosts as possible. Through organic interactions, bonds are created naturally. This innovative method allows the child to have a voice in their plan and a choice in who they get to know. Once a match is made, kids spend time with their volunteer hosts on weekends and during school breaks in order to build trust over time, at a pace that feels safe to the child. This more natural and child-centric approach ensures a lasting, successful match because everyone, including the child, is invested in the process and the outcome.

How it Works



WHAT IS WEEKEND MIRACLES HOUSTON?

Kidsave Weekend Miracles®, provides a new way to find adoptive parents for older children and teens in foster care. 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 and school break visits with host families who work with and support the children to help them find permanent families. Hosts often become life-long connections and/or adoptive families.

HOW DOES THE WEEKEND MIRACLES PROGRAM WORK?

- Children are prepared and prospective hosts are recruited, trained and approved to participate.
- Children and prospective hosts 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 commit to spending a minimum of 2 days a month with the child for one year. They develop a relationship of trust and the host advocates to help find the child a permanent family. The host introduces kids to their networks and to their community.
- Miracles happen! A family may fall in love with a child and make the commitment to adopt the child they host. Others may be inspired to become hosts or advocates for the child.

HOW ARE CHILDREN MATCHED WITH HOST FAMILIES?

The opinions of the children in the program are always considered and, as such, are a key factor to the program's success. Matches with host families are encouraged based on interests, mutual goals, and the ages and genders of any children living in the host family's home.

WHO ARE THE CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN WEEKEND MIRACLES HOUSTON?

- Ages 9 to 17, single children and sibling groups.
- Children living with foster families, in general residential operations, and residential treatment centers throughout the Houston area.
- Children who might have educational, emotional, and/or medical needs.



HOW ARE CHILDREN SELECTED TO PARTICIPATE?

Children referred to the program must be open to a connection with a host in order to achieve legal or relational permanency, and capable of actively participating in supervised in-person and virtual events. Once matched, they must be able to independently engage with their host without a caregiver present and successfully adapt to family living.

WHO CAN HOST?

- Hosts must be at least 25 years old and can be single, married, divorced, or separated, any sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Hosts must be in good health; able to actively support, advocate for, and mentor 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 residence must provide a safe environment and include adequate space.

WHAT IF I DECIDE I WANT TO ADOPT THE CHILD I AM HOSTING?

Some host families decide they are interested in adopting their host child. We are delighted when hosts and children develop such a strong connection. Let us know, as soon as you think you might be interested in adoption. You should not, however, say anything directly to the child.

To be considered as an adoptive placement, hosts must complete the adoption licensing and home study process through a local child placement agency. While you will undoubtedly be considered because you have built a relationship with the child, there is no guarantee that you will be able to adopt that child. The child's social worker has a number of factors to consider when assessing an adoptive family.

WHAT KIND OF TRAINING AND SUPPORT WILL HOST FAMILIES RECEIVE?

Host families must complete Kidsave's proprietary 12-hour trauma-based training and 90-minute program and advocacy training facilitated by Kidsave. This training is designed to prepare you for the unique challenges and responsibilities of hosting and parenting an older child in foster care.

Families must also complete DFPS's self-guided trainings: "Recognizing and Reporting Child Sexual Abuse" and "Psychotropic Medications."

Hosts will receive training materials and resources such as the Host Family Handbook. Kidsave staff supports our families through the entire approval process and during hosting. We are always here for you!

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF
KIDSANE'S PARTNERS IN
THE WEEKEND MIRACLES
PROGRAM?

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

WHAT DOES KIDSANE
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 Weekend Miracles Houston and the participating children
- Fundraising to sustain the program
- Support to our partners to assist in meeting state guidelines and permanency goals

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:

- Champion children by reaching out to your circle of friends, family, and members of your community and co-workers about kids who need a forever family.
- Volunteer at weekend events, fundraisers, or community presentations, help us families, mentors, and other volunteers.
- Follow us on social media and help us spread the word.
- Create or join a committee for fundraising, event planning, or outreach.
- Choose Kidsave International as your charity when you shop Amazon Smile or other retailers who support the charity of your choice.
- **Donate! Every dollar goes to programs that help kids find families.**



We hope you decide to host. We are sure you will find it to be a rewarding experience. The following is an overview to familiarize you with the hosting process and next steps. Every child in the Weekend Miracles Houston program is in the permanent managing conservatorship of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, we are required to follow and maintain specific standards for a child to stay in your home. While the process is faster and less extensive than becoming licensed to foster/adopt, we understand it can still seem lengthy or daunting. Please do not feel overwhelmed. Kidsave is with you every step of the way! You've got this!



HOSTS AGREE TO:

1. Spend time with the child at least two times per month for a minimum of one year.
2. Be a stable, caring, and consistent connection.
3. Advocate for your host child to find an adoptive family by:
 - Introducing the child to your family, friends, neighbors, parishioners, and colleagues.
 - Taking the child to monthly Weekend Miracles advocacy events and working with Kidsave to plan additional activities/gatherings where the child can meet adults interested in adoption.
4. Work with members of the child's team to advocate and support the child.
5. Stay in regular contact with the Weekend Miracles Houston staff
6. Submit a Host Family Report after each visit.
7. Transport the child for host family visits and to monthly advocacy events.
8. Respect the child's boundaries and maintain the child's confidentiality by only sharing information approved for release.
9. Be patient and give grace. Being in foster care is traumatic and affects how children interact with others and also impacts their ability to trust new people.
10. Create a photo album of the time spent together with your host child.

HOSTS MUST COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING:

1. Attend a Weekend Miracles Houston Orientation.
2. Complete and submit the Weekend Miracles Houston Host Application.
3. Submit copies of your valid TX driver's license and proof of automobile insurance and registration.
4. Provide a current photo and proof of CPR/First Aid Certification and TB testing.
5. Attend 12 hours of Kidsave Weekend Miracles Houston training, which covers trauma-informed parenting and advocating for older children in foster care. If you have already completed PRIDE or similar training, you are encouraged, but not required, to attend our training. You will be asked to submit a copy of your training completion certificate and/or license to foster/adopt.
6. Attend the 90-minute Program and Advocacy Training, which covers program protocols, the roles and responsibilities of a host, and provides tools and resources to assist hosts in their advocacy efforts.
7. Submit your certificates of completion for DFPS's self-guided Recognizing and Reporting Child Sexual Abuse Training and Psychotropic Medication Training.
8. Complete a Family interview and Home Environmental and Safety Evaluation to confirm your home meets DFPS safety requirements under normalcy guidelines, and answer your questions or concerns about hosting.