
DUFFEL BAGS FOR FOSTER CARE

LAUNCHING A RESTORING DIGNITY
MINISTRY IN YOUR CHURCH





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When Hope Church Las Vegas challenged its members to ask God how He wanted to use them in ministry, the Murray family prayed, and God answered. They became a licensed foster family. The Murrays expected to change the lives of children in foster care—what they didn’t expect was the affect it would have on their biological son.

When their first placement arrived, teenage Nijel Murray noticed that boy didn’t have any clothes that fit.

“When we bought him clothes, he seemed so much happier,” Nijel says of his first foster brother. I thought this probably happens to a lot of kids in foster care, so I decided that I could do something.”

Nijel started Klothes 4 Kids. He hosts clothing drives and gift card drives, sometimes even forgoing birthday presents to raise more resources for the ministry. He delivers full bags of clothes and supplies to foster families with new placements. “My goal is to help as many kids as possible,” Nijel says.



Nijel Murray has provided duffel bags full of clothes to dozens of kids.

As the ministry grows, he is receiving more requests from case workers and foster parents in need of assistance.

Churches are uniquely called and equipped to take care of those who are vulnerable, neglected and far from home. One thing the church can do is to create Restoring Dignity Duffel Bags that will give children some new items of their own to help them settle into foster homes.

Discover the Needs in your Community

Before you begin any new ministry, it is important to first take time to discover and understand the unique needs within your community in a process called “exegeting the community.” Explore the physical community, listen to and learn from people living and working in the area and seek God’s guidance by prayer-driving and prayer-walking the neighborhood.

To learn more about how to exegete your community, download the [Discovering Needs in your Community Ministry guide](#).

If preparing your church to be ready to respond to a disaster is a need and desire within your congregation, keep reading! We have practical steps to help you get started.

If not, [check out some of our other ministry guides](#) for opportunities that fit for your church’s gifting and community’s needs.

Foster Care in America

- Each year more than 400,000 children and teenagers are in foster care, and about 250,000 move in and out of the system.¹
- Many children have been victims of frequent abuse and continued neglect.
- Children in foster care have much higher rates of physical, developmental and mental concerns than children outside the foster care system.²
- Children and teens in the U.S. end up in foster care because of: neglect (75%), physical abuse (18%), sexual abuse (8%), psychological and other types of neglect (7%).³ (Because some children/teens suffered from more than one type of maltreatment, the percentages exceed 100%.)

These children and teens are often removed from their homes with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Providing these children with new clothes, toiletries and items of comfort help them begin to feel safe as they walk through times of transition. Restoring Dignity Duffel Bags can help meet this need.

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport25.pdf

2. "Health Care Issues for Children and Adolescents in Foster Care and

Kinship Care," American Academy of Pediatrics, v. 136, no. 4, October 2015, <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/136/4/e1142>

3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families, "Child Maltreatment," January 25, 2016; <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/child-maltreatment-2014>.



The bottom line is this:
*Children in foster care need help and support. You
and your church can make a difference!*

Strategically Considering Ministry Opportunities

Take the next step by enlisting a small group of people within your congregation to assess ministry opportunities by working through the following questions:

What partnerships in your community have you considered connecting to meet this need and use this resource? These could include government officials, foster agencies, other community churches and leaders, local children's homes or other preestablished programs addressing foster care.

- **Who in your church is passionate and equipped to lead or participate in this ministry?** Consider children's workers, parents and/or families, teenagers or youth groups, Sunday school classes, senior adults — anyone with a desire to help provide resources to help the children entering foster care. Don't overwhelm people with large statistical numbers. Start small and local to give them a chance to understand the immediate and local need.
- **What resources and relationships has God given your church to support this ministry?** Consider missions offerings, other financial resources, church members who are connected to local child welfare agencies, those with the gift of couponing and Sunday school classes as places to start.
- **What space can be used to collect and stockpile donations and for filling backpacks/duffels?** Consider unused classrooms, closets or storage units that can provide secure, dry storage.

These questions can lead this small group of local missionaries to determine whether or not:

1. There is a desire within the congregation to meet this need.
2. There are resources of people, space and money to meet this need.
3. This ministry is sustainable over time.
4. You feel God leading you as a congregation in this direction.

STARTING A FOSTER CARE BAG

God may be moving you to be the catalyst of starting a ministry to children in foster care your community. If so, where do you start? We've provided eight steps that can lead you to successfully meeting this much-needed ministry:



1. **Learn about the needs of foster children in America.** Research the needs and issues of foster children in America. Then contextualize those needs according to your specific community. Statistics show us that there are over 400,000 children and youth in the U.S. foster care system, but contextualizing those numbers to reflect specific needs in your local community will allow your church to be more effective with foster children in your own back yard.
2. **Schedule meetings with local organizations who are involved in helping children going into foster care locally.** Relationships are key. Find out what is being done and what help is needed. Discuss the details of Restoring Dignity Duffel Bags, and find out what the needs of the organization are. Be kind, patient and diligent. Most of these organizations are understaffed and overloaded. Start by simply asking, "How can I help?" Serve with excellence in order to open up more opportunities to be the hands and feet of Jesus to hurting children.
3. **Share the local needs with your church staff and small groups.** Remember, don't overwhelm them with huge, national numbers and stats without contextualizing those numbers to reflect local need. Ask to begin collecting items through Vacation Bible School ministry, youth groups, senior adult groups, etc. Create foyer displays with statistics as a constant visible reminder of the needs.
4. **Make a budget, including all the resources and materials you will need and a schedule for operating.** Answer each of these questions:
 - Based on the information you've received from local organizations, how much aid and support will the church commit to do? Determine how often supplies and backpacks/duffels will be collected from the congregation and passed on to local ministries for children in foster care. Recognize that this need is ongoing.

- How will you pay for Restoring Dignity supplies? (Possibilities: church budget, donations, grants, church-wide love offerings, fundraising, corporate donations, discount store donations.)
- How will supplies be purchased or collected? (By volunteers, donations of supplies and/or filled backpacks/duffels)
- How and where will you store and pack backpacks/duffels before delivery?
- When should collection of supplies and/or cash begin? When is the target deadline for the delivery of backpacks/duffels?

5. **Find volunteers.** You'll need a strong, dependable group of volunteers to keep your program organized and successful.

The **volunteer leader's** responsibilities include: enlisting additional volunteers, coordinating the transportation and delivery to local ministries, and fundraising. The leader communicates with the local ministries about the program, keeps track of how well the program is working, and coordinates events to raise money. Finally, the leader organizes the collection of supplies for Restoring Dignity Backpacks or Duffels.

Other volunteers pack the backpacks/duffels and deliver them to local ministry partners.

Babies & Toddlers	Older Children	Teens
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duffel bag • Set of pajamas • 3 Outfits • Socks • Small blanket or other comfort item • Age-appropriate Bible • Age-appropriate small toy • Diapers or trainers • Wipes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duffel bag • Set of pajamas • 3 Outfits • Socks • Underwear • Comfort items like a stuffed animal • Age-appropriate Bible • Age-appropriate small toy • Toothbrush & toothpaste 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duffel bag • Jeans and shorts • Tops • Pajamas or lounge pants • Socks • Underwear • Comfort item • Bible • Journal/pens • Toothbrush & toothpaste • Deodorant
<p><i>Label each bag according to gender and age.</i></p>		

6. **Collect duffel Items.** Begin collecting two months before established delivery date by providing a list of needed items (see below). Two weeks before delivery date, inventory items received, and purchase needed items using monetary donations. Many churches have success by asking church members to donate needed items. Some members will prefer to supply the entire contents for a duffel. Suggested items per duffel:

Each duffel should be labeled with sizes and gender. The clothing items in each bag should be new and the same size, keeping in mind that new items for many of these children are a luxury they've never had.

7. **Deliver Restoring Dignity Duffels to ministry partner(s).** Set up a time and deliver bags to ministry partner(s). Pray over bags before they leave your location, and pray for them as they are delivered. Pray for the children who will receive them. As you are able, pray for the workers within the ministry partners.
8. **Evaluate the program's success.** After the first collection and delivery of Restoring Dignity Duffels, closely review how successful the project has been with the following questions:
- Did the project run smoothly? If not, why not?
 - What problems or issues have come up for which you were unprepared? How can these be handled?
 - How good is the relationship with the church and the local ministry partner? What can you do to strengthen those relationships?
 - Could you expand the project to include more bags or additional ministry partners? What would that take?
9. **Consider other ways to help children going into foster care and their foster families.**
- Begin a prayer ministry in the church for the children, the workers and the families within the foster care system. [Here's a list of prayer concerns.](#)
 - Learn how to [expand your ministry by partnering with social services.](#)
 - Develop a ministry to families with foster children, such as: providing meals, helping with lawn care and other home chores, creating a support group ministry, and host date-night childcare so foster parents can get a few hours to themselves.

What's Next?

This is your opportunity to meet a huge need in your community...
One child, one family and one bag at a time.



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