

Churches, nonprofit groups working to ease foster home shortage *Navigating Oklahoma's bureaucratic foster care system can be daunting, but several church and nonprofit groups have stepped forward within the last few years to assist individuals interested in becoming foster parents.*

BY RANDY ELLIS AND ROBBY TRAMMELL Published: February 19, 2012

Several Oklahoma church and nonprofit groups have stepped forward within the past couple of years to assist people who are interested in becoming foster parents.

Deborah Smith, director of the Department of Human Services' children and family services division, pointed to the 111 Project as an example of what Oklahoma churches are doing to ease the foster home shortage.

The project was launched by Oklahoma City metro-area churches in April 2011 with a short-term goal of recruiting 111 foster families from among their members.

There are about 7,300 abused and neglected children in out-of-home DHS custody. Oklahoma has more than 6,000 churches statewide, according to the 111project.org website.

"If every church commits at least one family, every Oklahoma foster child has a home," the website states.

Smith said the project is exciting because churches are committing not only to finding foster families, but also to finding volunteers willing to support those families.

Several nonprofit groups like Angels Foster Family Network OKC also have formed to assist individuals in becoming foster parents.

Angels is an Oklahoma County private foster child placement agency founded by Jennifer Abney of Edmond in 2008 with a goal of making the foster parenting process as pleasant as possible for everyone involved.

The Angels organization seeks out couples who not only are willing to serve as foster parents, but also are open to adoption, Abney said.

The organization trains its foster parents under a program approved by DHS.

Angels currently places only children from birth to 3 years old and their siblings with its foster families, although the group is considering increasing the age to 6, Abney said.

The organization has social workers who are available at all hours to answer foster parents' questions, she said.

DHS social workers also visit homes of Angels foster parents, but the Angels social workers offer an additional level of support, she said.

DHS began placing children through Angels about 18 months ago and already 25 families have received children, Abney said.

Angels also has recruited numerous volunteers who assist DHS workers at the Oklahoma City shelter.

Smith said churches and groups like Angels provide valuable support to foster parents in overcoming challenges in parts of the state where they are active, but such services are more available in some parts of the state than in others.

<http://newsok.com/churches-nonprofit-groups-working-to-ease-foster-home-shortage/article/3650503/>