



Dave Thomas
Foundation
for Adoption®

Finding Forever Families for Children in Foster Care

December 2, 2019

Senator James Ohrenschall, Chair
Assemblywoman Daniele Monroe-Moreno, Vice Chair
Legislative Committee on Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice

RE: Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption / Wendy's Wonderful Kids

Dear Senator Ohrenschall and Assemblywoman Monroe-Moreno:

It is my privilege to write today to share with the Committee our work in foster care adoption in the state of Nevada and across the nation. The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption is a national nonprofit public charity founded in 1992 with the singular mission of dramatically increasing the adoptions of children from America's foster care system. Operating with the belief that *every* child deserves a safe, nurturing and permanent home, the Foundation implements programs in support of the 125,000 children waiting to be adopted in the United States.

Since 2004, the Foundation has conceived, launched, evaluated and grown Wendy's Wonderful Kids, a signature foster care adoption program. This results-driven initiative supports adoption professionals who tirelessly work for children and youth waiting to be adopted and specifically within the target population that is most at risk of aging out of care without a family – children aged nine and older, children in sibling groups, children with special needs or who have been in care for so long that they have tragically given up hope for a family and resist efforts at finding them a permanent home. When these children age out of care, they are at a much higher risk of negative outcomes, including homelessness, unemployment, early parenting and substance abuse – simply because they do not have the safety net of family and community in which to thrive.

The child-focused recruitment model that is the core operating strategy of Wendy's Wonderful Kids has been proven to be up to three times more effective than business as usual, determined through a five-year randomized control trial evaluation completed by Child Trend in Washington, D.C. Key to the model is that recruiters work with smaller caseloads of the children most at risk of aging out of the system. This ensures they have the time and resources to give each child the attention he or she deserves. These professionals are determined and relentless, using proven tactics focused on finding the best home for a child through the starting points of familiar circles of family, friends and connected adults and then reaching out to the communities in which they live.

The Foundation currently has the privilege of both supporting and engaging in a co-investment relationship with the state of Nevada, supporting nine adoption professionals (WWK Recruiters) employed by The Adoption Exchange, to work on behalf of the longest waiting children in the state. To date, our work in Nevada has resulted in 145 adoptions of children. Significantly, the children currently on the caseloads in Nevada are, on average, age 14; 45% are in sibling groups; 95% have identified special needs; they have been in care an average of six years; and tragically, they have experience as high as 16 placements before being placed with a WWK recruiter.

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption has recently increased its support across the nation in order to take this program to full scale, serving children and youth in ten states (CO, KY, LA, MI, NC, NY, OH, OK, UT and WA). We are excited that, through this partnership, nearly every child in the target population of those most at risk of aging out a care, are being served by a WWK recruiter. We are equally excited about the potential in Nevada to also continue to take this program to scale, to secure its long-term sustainability and, in partnership, to most effectively serve Nevada's longest waiting, but no less deserving children.

We are grateful for the Committee's attention to the needs of its children and welcome the opportunity to share more about Wendy's Wonderful Kids. If there is any other information that I can provide, please know that your call is always welcome.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RSmm', followed by a horizontal line.

Rita L. Soronen
President & CEO
614.764.8482 (direct)

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption is a national nonprofit public charity dedicated to dramatically increasing the adoptions of the more than 130,000 children waiting in North America's foster care systems. Created by Wendy's® founder, Dave Thomas, who was adopted, the Foundation implements evidence-based results-driven national signature programs, foster care adoption awareness initiatives and innovative grantmaking.