

Wendy's Wonderful Kids

The *Wendy's Wonderful Kids* program, administered by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption (DTFA), aims to increase adoptions from foster care, focusing primarily on children for whom it has been traditionally difficult to find families: older children, groups of siblings, and children with physical or emotional challenges. The philosophy of *Wendy's Wonderful Kids* (WWK) is that “Unadoptable is Unacceptable.” Children are eligible to be served by the program if they are in the public foster care system, have been freed for adoption, have a permanency plan of adoption, or a plan to be freed for adoption (this may be a concurrent plan). Children may also be in Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA).

WWK adoption specialists (or recruiters) employ effective, aggressive, and accountable child-focused recruitment activities. They directly engage youth to explore their attitudes towards adoption and seek their input on prospective adoptive resources. Recruiters conduct an exhaustive search for people with whom the child has had a bond or positive relationship. The WWK model contains eight major components (illustrated on the following page). WWK recruiters manage a smaller caseload: 20-25 recommended, with active recruitment for 12-15 children.

As of 2014, there were 204 WWK recruiters working throughout the U.S. and Canada. There are several WWK grantees in New York State: You Gotta Believe (New York City, Long Island, Hudson Valley); Children Awaiting Parents, Inc. (Western NY); Children's Home of Wyoming Conference; Hillside Children's Center (Western NY); Jewish Child Care Association (New York City); New York Council on Adoptable Children (New York City). Due to common challenges with hiring policies in public agencies, only 1 in 10 grantees nationwide are public/governmental child welfare organizations.

Resources needed for implementation

Local districts and voluntary agencies are eligible for grants from DTFA to hire WWK recruiters. These annual, renewable grants of approximately \$70,000 provide salary, travel, and supplies for each WWK recruiter. The recruiters are housed within the offices of public or private agencies, with access to children and their case files. WWK program staff provide comprehensive training and coaching to each grantee. Another option for implementation is DTFA providing free classroom training and technical assistance to existing workers to implement the model in return for submission of evaluation data. DTFA also provides an online training module to introduce caseworkers to the model.

For More Information

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Evidence base

A rigorous, five-year evaluation by Child Trends found that when served by WWK, older children and those with emotional challenges were three times more likely to be adopted. Overall, children served by the program were nearly two times (1.7 times) more likely to be adopted. For the full report, see <http://www.childtrends.org/?publications=the-impact-of-child-focused-recruitment-on-foster-care-adoption-a-five-year-evaluation-of-wendys-wonderful-kids-evaluation-summary>. A video by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLP3pAfCHgo>. WWK has been reviewed by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC) and is listed in the CEBC registry.

