



## Helping At-Risk Kids: A Must-Do Plan, part 3 of 3—

# Grab Their Hands! They're Drowning!

by Marshall Bruner

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## Local Government and Faith-Based Organizations

The primary focus of the Division of Social Services Children's Division is (1) to provide a safe environment for at-risk children and youth whose families have abused or neglected them; (2) to locate and train foster parents who will include these children and youth in their family structures; and (3) to locate and train foster parents who may eventually become adoptive parents. However, through my research I discovered that relatively little is being done in the way of prevention. I surmise the reason is because DSS is simply overwhelmed with the mandates of finding foster and adoptive parents. However, if more could be done to reach the children, youth, and families before they become at risk, then fewer families would break apart because of the overwhelming pressures they face and cannot resolve.

With that in mind, the Church can offer numerous ways to partner with the local DSS Children's Division to assist them in the "continuum" of prevention. (Note: The "continuum"

of care, as considered by DSS Children's Division, consists of these three to four prongs: prevention, foster care, returning—if at all possible—the child or youth to the natural family, and, as a last result, adoption.)

### State Mentorship Programs

**1** As a child or youth has been identified by DSS Children's Division, the State may appoint a mentor for that child/youth.

**2** A mentor may be appointed for the continuum of care to the child/youth.

**3** Because many at-risk children, when first going into the foster-care system, are placed with two or more foster parents, the need for stability in their lives is overwhelmingly critical. The at-risk child who may be shuffled from family member to family member, then from foster home to foster home, could use a constant in his life—that stability being a mentor who would provide unconditional love and who would remain involved in that child's life until growing up.

Option 1 mentoring would be a church-based program that

operates under the direction of the church leadership. The church must ensure that the mentors are properly screened and that the children are properly supervised. This form of mentorship would be to (1) pair up an at-risk child with a mentor/coach who could do activities with the child in an open area of the church where other adults are available; or (2) assign a mentor/coach to a child who would do group activities in which other mentors and children are participating.

Option 2 mentoring would be a program endorsed by the DSS Children's Division. One example of a State-endorsed program is the Assemblies of God "Shapes" ministry, which currently operates solely in Missouri but is projected to become a national program. Shapes provides mentorship training to adults who become mentors to children whose parents are incarcerated.

### Adopt-a-Family

See information contained in "The Local Church" section in part 1.

## Respite, Foster Care and Adoption

**1** Individuals, couples, or church groups provide time off for foster parents

**2** Minimal training of approximately 10 hours (standards set by the state may vary)

**3** Background check and home study required

The DSS Children's Division county offices primarily focus on (1) training respite workers who can provide occasional relief so foster parents can relax and take a brief respite; (2) recruiting and training foster parents; (3) recruiting and training foster parents who may later adopt—additional training required. With each area of care, both screening and training are required. However, though a major commitment is required for these three areas of care, the at-risk child in the foster-care system can receive the maximum nurturing and spiritual leadership from the Christian adults who dedicate themselves to this cause.

### Miscellaneous Helps for Foster Children

Below are a variety of ways anyone can assist the foster families who have taken in at-risk children. This list is provided by the Department of Social Services Children's Division and can be reproduced in your church publications:

- ❖ Provide child care during foster parent events
- ❖ Provide birthday or Christmas gifts to foster children

- ❖ Donate gift certificates for a foster family movie night
- ❖ Donate Christmas ornaments to foster children
- ❖ Donate stuffed animals for children entering foster care
- ❖ Offer to buy a foster child a new pair of glasses
- ❖ Help promote foster parenting within your church
- ❖ Donate a new coat for a foster child
- ❖ Donate toys or activities for the visitation room at the local Children's Division office
- ❖ Buy a new pair of shoes for a foster child starting school
- ❖ Donate nice clothes to foster children through the Children's Division
- ❖ Contact the Children's Division during the holidays to see how you can help
- ❖ Offer to buy a class ring for a child in foster care
- ❖ Offer to buy uniforms or equipment for foster child involved in activities, such as cheerleading or other sports or school band
- ❖ Donate fingernail polish, makeup, or earrings for a girl in foster care
- ❖ Buy a scouting [or Royal Rangers/Missionettes] uniform for a foster child
- ❖ Provide respite care
- ❖ Donate gift certificate for a haircut
- ❖ Donate laundry detergent to a foster family
- ❖ Donate a gift certificate to a local restaurant for a foster family night out

- ❖ Have a luggage drive to collect luggage or backpacks for children in foster care
- ❖ Donate bedding to foster families
- ❖ Donate gift certificate for a girl in foster care to have her hair and nails done for special school events

## Conclusion

As you can see, there are numerous ways you can begin ministering to the at-risk children in your community. The opportunities are greater than ever before. Allow the Holy Spirit to begin speaking to your heart as to how you can become involved in the lives of at-risk children. You will discover that the Lord will begin to provide ample opportunities to minister to the needs of these children because His heart is continually torn when hearing their cries.

At-risk children are everywhere. God is waiting for your response.

For more information on outreach opportunities, see the *Reach the Children* CD, which contains 270 pages of outreach ministry ideas. To order, contact Gospel Publishing House at 1-800-641-4310 and request item 71-5199.

# KIDZ⇒2⇒KIDZ™

## National Children's Ministries Agency

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## School Kit

Kidz⇒to⇒Kidz is a project that enables the children of your church to reach out in love to an impoverished family. More than half the world's population lives on less than \$2 a day, and an estimated 250,000 children will die of malnutrition this year.

Items included in the Kidz⇒to⇒Kidz school kit are the most commonly requested educational supplies. By partnering with us, you will brighten the lives of precious children struggling to improve their lives.

## School Kit Shopping list

- 1 spiral notebook (8.5" x 11" – 100 sheets)
- 1 package of pencils (qty. 5)
- 1 package of pens (qty. 5)
- 1 blunt scissors
- 1 pencil sharpener
- 1 eraser (3" or smaller)
- 1 box of crayons (8 piece)  
**CRAYOLA BRAND SPECIFICALLY**
- 1 ruler (with metric)
- 1 glue stick (package of two)
- 1 1-gal. Ziploc bag

## Important Custom Note

Any variations in the kit contents could result in some children within the classroom as feeling either favored or slighted.

## Important Packing Instructions

Begin by placing the requested items into the Ziploc bag. Complete the *K-2-K Packing Form*. Give your K-2-K kit(s) and packing form to your children's pastor/leader. In turn, your children's pastor/leader will arrange to deliver the kits to a local school where needy children are in great need of these school supplies.

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## Hygiene Kit

Kidz⇒to⇒Kidz is a project that enables the children of your church to reach out in love to an impoverished family in your community. More than half the world's population lives on less than \$2 a day, and an estimated 250,000 children will die of malnutrition this year.

Items included in the Kidz⇒to⇒Kidz hygiene kit are the most commonly requested supplies. By partnering with your community, you will brighten the lives of precious children struggling to improve their lives.

## Hygiene Kit Shopping List

- 1 hand towel
- 1 wash cloth
- 1 comb (pocket size)
- 1 bar of soap (anti-bacterial)
- 1 toothbrush
- 1 toothpaste (4-5 oz. Size)
- 1 shampoo (travel size)
- 1 1-gal. Ziploc bag

## Important Note

Any variations in the box contents could result in one child of a family feeling neglected. Please **DO NOT** include printed materials, personal notes, cash, or anything else not indicated.

## Important Packing Instructions

Begin by placing the requested items into the Ziploc bag. Give your K-2-K kit(s) and packing form to your children's pastor/leader. The children's pastor/leader, in turn, will arrange to distribute the packet to either the school administrators or community leaders within your community.