THREE W I S H E S

"If you had three wishes, what would you wish for?"

We ask almost every child and teen that question when they sit down with us for the I Belong Project™ video shoot. We get some really great answers. Here are some of our favorites:

“A mustang, a mansion, and a dog!”
Zanna, 12 years old

“I want to go to Washington and see the White House.”
Kylee, 16 years old

“Being on television and seeing all the Duck Dynasty people, a lot of money, and to have a great parent.”
Harley, 11 years old

And sometimes when we ask that question, a child or teen just breaks down and cries. After all the gulps and quiet attempts to get out the words, he simply says: “I just want a family”. He wants to belong to someone forever.

“I wish I could be in a great home.”
Braylon, 11 years old

“I wish I could get a family that cares and loves me the rest of my life.”
Caleb, 16 years old

“I wish for a peaceful life and to be with my brother.”
Alissa, 12 years old

Kids, we hear you and we are sharing your message. We are sharing the message family by family, state by state, church by church, business by business.

America’s Kids Belong is empowering families and leaders to end the crisis for kids in foster care. We are working hard for these kids.

And our work is only beginning.

LET’S GET TO WORK!
In 2019, America’s Kids Belong produced and distributed our 1,000th I Belong Project™ video!

Shared on social media and in churches, these videos give a face, name and personality to children waiting in foster care for a forever family. These videos deliver a message from a waiting child to potential families. In Kansas, one teen’s video was shared over 600 times. Twenty-eight families were so moved by what they saw and heard that they made an official inquiry with the state about adopting him. Twenty of those inquiries came within the first three days of releasing his video online. The state is in the process of matching him with just the right family...forever. That’s one story out of hundreds across multiple states.

BUT STORIES AREN’T ENOUGH

There are thousands of untold and unheard stories in foster care. For the 400,000 children in America’s foster care system, sharing stories is not enough. We not only have to move families, we have to move culture, institutions, and leaders to become involved in solving this crisis.

This year America’s Kids Belong also launched its third state-wide Collective Impact campaign. Like our work in other states, Virginia’s initiative empowers leaders in government, business, and faith spheres. The campaign, known as Virginia Fosters, reaches out to hundreds of churches and multiple county governments. In October, a full Business Impact initiative was launched alongside Virginia’s Governor. In Colorado, South Dakota, Tennessee and in more states coming soon, we are working in all three spheres. And sharing the stories of the kids is what ties it all together.

WHAT ELSE HAPPENED IN 2019?

A LOT! Here are some of our highlights:

- Expanded our Faith Sphere programs and resources, went back on tour with Chris Tomlin and hired a Faith Sphere Manager. Read more on page 5

- Received the 2019 Adoption Excellence Award from the Administration of Children & Families. Read more on page 7

- Further developed our Business Impact Partner program nation-wide. Read more on page 8

- Partnered with our third governor to launch another state-wide initiative. Read more on page 11

- Reached an I Belong Project™ milestone and began telling the stories of foster parents, businesses and pastors. Read more on page 13

- Began officially working in two new states: Indiana and Kentucky! See our ever-expanding map on pages 9, 10

Every day this past year, the America’s Kids Belong team has been working with leaders across these states and spheres to go both deep and wide for these kids. But the work is only beginning.

LET’S GET TO WORK!
FOCUS FAITH

A BIG PROBLEM REQUIRES A BIGGER SOLUTION

Meet Krista Petty. America’s Kids Belong new Faith Sphere Manager. Krista is charged with collating resources and empowering our staff and faith leaders to effectively impact their local foster care community. If it’s one thing that children in foster care need, it’s families. Where can you find families?

Within faith communities.

While the number of children in foster care is a big problem, the faith community is even bigger. Over 132 million different people attend a church on some basis. And it’s not just the numbers. Faith communities have incredible diversity—from all races and walks of life. Research tells us that practicing Christians are more than twice as likely to adopt than the general population, and they are three times more likely to seriously consider fostering.

THE 4R SOLUTION

Empowering faith leaders is not just about recruiting more foster families. It’s also about developing relationships, researching and retaining. Our 4R Solution widens the conversation of foster care and adoption so that it includes EVERYONE in the solution.

Essentially, we ask faith communities to engage in a robust ministry to foster families, including researching their needs, and wrapping around them with support. We are also asking faith communities to become trauma engaged, so kids and families can trust the local church to be a place of healing. Yes, we are making a big ask of faith leaders.

That is why we developed a Church Resources member site online and hired Krista full time for training and resource development.

America’s Kids Belong is hard at work calling and resourcing the church to action. And our work is just beginning.

As a former empty nester now foster and adoptive mom, Krista shares: “Why limit the journey of parenting to a full or empty nest? Imagine the impact of having an open nest—where another child is welcome to spread their wings and take flight from your loving and safe home base.”

In 2019, nine of our top church resources were translated into Spanish, to meet the growing need for Spanish-speaking foster parent recruitment.

The Church at Loveland sent volunteers to help Colorado foster families with home improvement projects on Serve Day 2019 in their community.

Flatirons Church participated in our AKB Trauma Workshop led by Lindy Johnson, AKB Trauma Trainer and Director of Organizational Health, and Brian Mavis, AKB President. Flatirons also facilitated Wrap Around Training to support parents and families who care for children and youth in foster care.
**FOCUS BUSINESS**

**AWARD WINNING DREAM MAKING**

In November, America’s Kids Belong and our Dream Makers Project received the 2019 Adoption Excellence Award for Business Contributions/Initiatives from the Administration of Children and Families in the US Department of Health and Human Services. This national award and ceremony recognized the extraordinary contributions made supporting positive permanency outcomes for youth in foster care. We are honored to be recognized for our work.

To date, the Dream Makers Project has raised more than $700,000 for youth aging out of the foster care system without a forever or adoptive family. That funding has been used to purchase new furniture for a first apartment, a laptop for college, job training, and other essentials for the life transition that occurs when someone turns 18. While the Dream Makers Project has been our main connection to the business community, in 2019 our focus on business expanded greatly.

**THE MOST FOSTER FRIENDLY MAIN STREET IN AMERICA**

In October, Mayor Ken Moore of Franklin, Tennessee declared that his town had the Most Foster Friendly Main Street in America. This was after 40 Franklin businesses signed on to become Tennessee Kids Belong Business Impact Partners. Our chapters and affiliates in Colorado, South Dakota, and Virginia soon followed Tennessee’s lead. Business Impact Partners look for ways to support foster families and youth in a number of ways, including:

- Special discounts for foster families
- How company policies support foster families
- How their workforce could include teens aging out of foster care
- Focusing employee volunteer and mentoring opportunities on youth in foster care
- Financial and in-kind support of I Belong Project™, Dream Makers and America’s Kids Belong

To date, America’s Kids Belong has matched over 300 youth aging out of foster care with generous supporters. They are meeting their basic needs, connecting them with new opportunities, including employment and helping them achieve their dreams.

In partnership with their local chamber of commerce, Tennessee Kids Belong launched their Business Impact program, giving businesses a way to impact families and children in foster care. The Mayor of Franklin, TN even declared his Franklin the most “Foster-friendly main street in the country!” They have over 80 foster friendly businesses state wide with that number growing by the day.

“A foster mom told me she was walking in downtown Franklin and it was one of those days where the kids are melting down. She looked up and saw one of those stores that had our foster friendly sticker. She told me, ‘I shopped there before. I knew they were supporting foster families, but there was something in that moment that just made me cry and say I’ve got the community around me.’”

Kristin Allender, Executive Director, Tennessee Kids Belong

America’s Kids Belong means business. But the work is only beginning.
I Belong Project™ video shoots across 8 states
366 kids legally free for adoption videoed
1113 total I Belong Project™ videos since AKB started

1 New Governor’s Campaign
Virginia joins TN and OK in launching a full, state-wide Collective Impact Campaign advocating for kids in foster care

LIVING OUR VALUES!
We are BOLD, INTENTIONAL, RESILIENT, TRUSTWORTHY, COLLABORATIVE, EMPOWERING, JOYFUL, RESULTS-ORIENTED, ALWAYS IMPROVING

WHERE WE WORK

26 I Belong Project™ video shoots across 8 states
163 Businesses engaged this year with our new Business Impact Partner program

253 Churches informed & engaged this year for a total of 524 Churches informed & engaged since 2018

897 volunteers donated 3,771 hours
290 individuals Trained in Trauma

1113 total I Belong Project™ videos since AKB started

241 Dreams for youth aging out of foster care filled this year for a total of 684 Dreams filled since the Dream Makers Project started in August 2015

America’s Kids BELONG

WHERE WE WORK
FOCUS  GOVERNMENT

LISTENING. LEARNING. LEADING.

Any conversation, program, or solution about kids in foster care must include government partners because all children in foster care are in the custody of the state. What does partnering with the government for solutions look like?

Listening & Learning

You can’t walk into the challenge of foster care with all the answers. We must have a posture of listening to case workers and government officials to understand the true needs of children and families. We also listen for the true needs that exist in each locality and the needs of case workers. We listen, learn, and lean into discussions of policy and sustainable solutions.

Partnering with government may mean a formal partnership. In some cases, we work with Memorandums of Understanding before getting one of our programs activated in a state. Sometimes that means informal partnerships that include long discussions about how to tackle one specific geographic location versus another. Either way, we know that in addressing the foster care crisis, government is a key partner.

LAUNCHING COLLECTIVE IMPACT

This past March in the Commonwealth of Virginia, America’s Kids Belong launched its third state-wide Collective Impact Campaign. Like our work in Oklahoma in 2015 and our ongoing work in Tennessee that started in 2016, Virginia’s initiative employs our “three-legged stool” model. In Virginia, Janet Kelly, America’s Kids Belong Co-Founder and Virginia’s Kids Belong President is working with the Faith Community, Business Community, and Government to bring more attention and synergy to focus on the nearly 1,000 kids waiting for adoption in Virginia’s foster care system. Since Virginia is a locally administered state, Janet is actually working with more than 100 local governments.

That’s a lot of listening. That’s a lot of partnerships. That’s a lot of work. But the work is just beginning.

I don’t know if I can unpack this amazing effort. This is so huge I have a hard time wrapping my mind around it. Virginia’s Kids Belong empowers leaders of the faith-based community, government, business, non-profit and creative sector to join together to end the foster care crisis.

Social Worker from Virginia

Democrats and Republicans alike stand behind Virginia’s Gov. Northam as he signed various bills designed to improve Virginia’s foster care system at the Virginia Fosters launch. Gov. Northam was joined by Carlos Johnson, 18, who was previously in the state’s foster care system, and emceed the event.
Giving kids in foster care a face and a voice to advocate for themselves is one of the cornerstones of our work. It’s called the I Belong Project™ and this year, we reached the 1,000 mark! Across ten states and over six years we have been filming and sharing the stories of children waiting in foster care to be adopted. In 2019, we had a 77% increase in the number of videos we produced for kids.

Filming is a collaboration of storytellers, videographers, caseworkers, volunteers, and local churches and businesses. IBP shoots, as we call them, have turned into quite awesome experiences for everyone involved. This past year has seen the IBP shoot evolve to include local sports mascots, masseuses for caseworkers, and “dance offs”. We have also seen art and animals included, which is therapeutic for many of the kids. Here is some feedback the I Belong Project™ received in 2019:

“This is the best day of my life!”
Child at IBP shoot in VA

“I watched his video again and again and again. I could see him through his own eyes, not just the eyes of the case worker.”
Prospective Parent turned Adoptive Parent in SD

“I was already thinking of fostering her, but the video confirmed it.”
Foster Parent recruited in TN

It takes hard work to breakdown the awareness barrier associated with foster care. The I Belong Project™ has broken that barrier a thousand times. But our work is just beginning.
**2019 FINANCES**

**THANK YOU DONORS!**

In 2019, AKB and our state chapters had a total of:

- **557** total donors
- **301** first-time donors
- **49** monthly donors

**INCOME & EXPENSES**

America’s Kids Belong is now able to receive stock and other non-cash donations through the National Christian Foundation, The America’s Kids Belong Fund, account #2984337.

**INCOME BY SOURCE**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Source</th>
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<tr>
<td>CHURCHES</td>
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<td>INDIVIDUALS (includes Special Event income)</td>
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<td>GRANTS/FOUNDATIONS</td>
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<td>HQ SUPPORT, Merchandise, and released restricted funds:</td>
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**PROGRAM EXPENSES**

- **ADMIN** 23%
- **FUNDRAISING** 10%
- **PROGRAM** 67%
Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the greatest movement leaders of our time. His pinnacle moment was when he spoke at the Lincoln Memorial. He didn’t propel the civil rights movement by protesting, “I have a complaint.” Rather, he advanced it by proclaiming, “I have a dream.” It is going to take a movement to end the crisis for kids in foster care—a movement of the best leaders across multiple sectors of society creating solutions together.

A lot of people only complain about what’s wrong with the foster care system. But those complaints won’t change it—but our dreams will. For AKB, we have a dream that no child will feel unloved, be endangered, or grow up in institutions—instead, we dream that every child will belong to a loving, safe, and permanent family.

To achieve that, we dream that one day,

- vulnerable families will be supported to prevent children from entering the system in the first place.
- when children enter foster care, there will be more than enough safe and loving families to welcome them so they don’t enter institutions and aren’t separated from siblings.
- when those kids are reunited to biological family members, those families will be supported so foster care isn’t their story anymore.
- when children need an adoptive family, there will be a line of families waiting for them and no one ages out alone.
- when the decreasing number of youth happens to age out, their community will help them toward connected independence so they don’t become another nameless statistic to the realms of homelessness, addiction, suicide, trafficking, etc.
- when foster and adoptive families—‘healing families’—open their hearts and homes to these kids, other families—‘helping families’—will wrap around them to help bear the burden so they don’t quit at such an alarming rate, causing further displacement for kids.
- churches will be the primary source for these foster and adoptive “healing families” and for the supportive “helping families.” Furthermore, church leadership will be trained in trauma care so their church can be the safest place in the community for kids from hard places.
- businesses will be “foster friendly,” by discounting services or products to foster and adoptive families, or by improving benefits to foster and adoptive employees, or by employing aged out youth.
- governors will advocate for the youth, convene leaders to get engaged, and support child welfare.
- storytellers will fuel the movement and inspire more dreams.

What’s your dream? What’s your place in this movement? Together, let’s get to work.
WILL YOU USE YOUR LEADERSHIP & INFLUENCE FOR KIDS IN FOSTER CARE?

We engage leaders, like you, to end the crisis for kids in foster care. Contact us to learn more.

**Business Leaders**, contact Danny Johnson
djohnson@amkidsbelong.org

**Faith Leaders**, contact Krista Petty
kpetty@amkidsbelong.org

**Government Leaders**, contact Ryan Kelly
rkelly@amkidsbelong.org

**Creative Leaders**, contact Julie Mavis
jmavis@amkidsbelong.org

To financially invest in the work of America's Kids Belong, visit www.AmericasKidsBelong.org.