

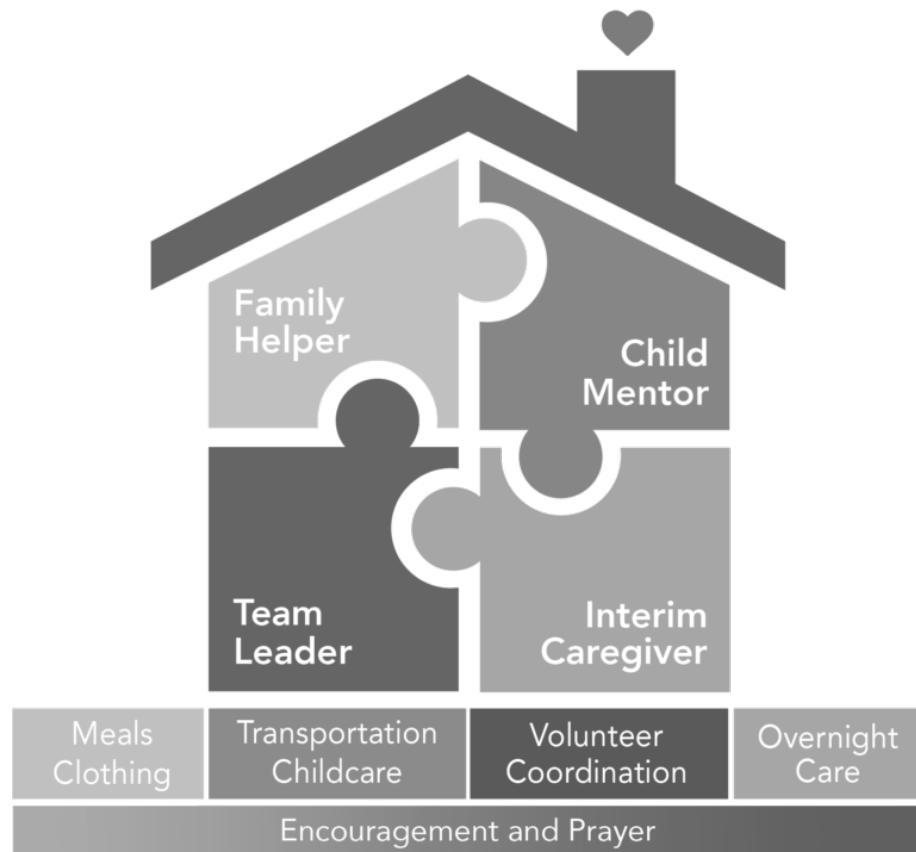
02 Forming Care Communities: Basics

Care Community Basics

What is a Care Community?

A Care Community is an engineered team, much like an extended family, of 4-8 committed and equipped volunteers who support and serve a foster, adoptive, kinship, or Safe family and all the children in their care. This team provides regular and ongoing practical help such as providing meals, tutoring, childcare, transportation, laundry, yard work, etc ...

The Care Community is a family-focused model that provides the most stability to all the children in the family's care. If children leave the family for any reason, the Care Community is there for the family to encourage them and offer continued support. It is at this critical time of transition when many foster families quit fostering. Our families have often reported the ongoing support of their Care Community has kept them fostering longer and stronger.



Essential Information about Care Communities

- On average, it takes about 4-6 weeks to completely set up a Care Community.
- All volunteers must view the Care Community Volunteer Orientation videos and sign the Volunteer Agreement before serving.
- More investment up front leads to less maintenance in the long run, allowing the Advocate to

shepherd/manage many more Care Communities.

- A Care Community must have a volunteer serving in the role of Team Leader.
- 6-8 volunteers is best (a married couple counts as one).
- 4 Family Helpers to bring meals is best for most supported families. For large families with more than four children, it is advisable to double the number of Family Helpers to 8 so the family benefits from two meals each week.
- It is ideal to have at least 2 Child Mentors, more if possible.
- The Interim Caregiver role does not have to be filled. Some families already have a respite family or a family member serving (who could also join the team). It is also possible the family does not feel it is wise yet for children to have overnight care. Volunteers often grow into this role as they get to know the family and children in their care.
- A volunteer may serve in multiple ways. *Eg: A Team Leader may also be a Family Helper and a Child Mentor.*
- If extra volunteers are waiting to serve, they may be scheduled to bring a frozen meal once a month or a second meal on certain weeks suggested by the supported family.

Identifying Families to Support in Your Church

One of the first tasks to accomplish after the Clinic is to assess how many families in your church might benefit from a Care Community. Who in your church is currently caring for vulnerable children or in the process of becoming licensed to do so? You'll need to identify your foster, adoptive, kinship, Safe families or families-in-crisis. We know these families (especially foster families) are most likely to quit within the first two years largely due to lack of support, so it's vital to put support in place for them before recruiting new families.

You can take several approaches to identify and then connect with these families.

- Place an announcement in the church bulletin or on social media making sure to give a contact number or email.
- Host a gathering for coffee, lunch, or a picnic.
- Ask existing foster and adoptive families for the names of other families who are fostering or adopting.
- Ask the youth/children's minister if they know of any existing families.
- Announce your FAM and ask for input from foster and adoptive families.
- Offer a giveaway to all foster, adoptive, kinship and Safe families who fill out a brief survey. Make sure to collect an email and phone number for further contact.

* If you only have a couple of families, or none at all within your church, and you want to serve families outside the walls of your own congregation, see the **Identifying Families to Serve Outside Your Church** document in the Tools section of this module.

* If families show an interest in being served by a Care Community, you can enter their basic info including phone, email and address in Promise Serves or have them or an agency fill out the Refer a Family form on Promise Serves. This makes it easy to geo-match equipped volunteers when you are ready to form Care Communities.