

Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale, FL
A Model of Cause-Related Community Involvement

by Krista Petty

Church Name:

Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale

Location:

Fort Lauderdale, FL

Web site:

www.calvaryftl.org

Compassion Ministry:

4KIDS of South Florida

www.4KIDSofsfl.org

Church size:

18,000

Key Audiences:

Churches desiring to make a significant impact in the lives of children and youth through work in the foster care system

Churches desiring to partner with other churches and organizations to find solutions to a special cause

Key Lessons:

Empower lay leaders to live out their passions

Respond to crisis in your own community

Abandon or delay one program to focus on another

From Internally Focused to Externally Focused

In 1997, the state of Florida was experiencing a slew of bad press centered around one special issue: the foster care system. Newspaper headlines and even the national news exposed a dire state of affairs. Foster children were lost and some children had even died and yet not been missed by the system that was to track and care for them. This dismal state got the attention of church leaders and members at Calvary Chapel, Fort Lauderdale (CCFL). They turned their interest into action. Although they had always been a church focused on community needs, they chose to focus energy, effort, and funds to solutions for foster care children and youth like never before.

Today, much to the credit of CCFL, children in Broward County are not only being enfolded into new homes, they are also finding Christian parents, receiving a quality education, being formally adopted, and even making decisions for Jesus Christ. Over the last 10 years, 6,000 kids were housed, fed, and loved in Christian shelters or foster homes as a part of the ministry started by CCFL: 4KIDS of South Florida. Additionally, over 100 children have been connected with families for adoption. Their ministry to children in foster care is in addition to their ministry to prisoners (8,719 male and female inmates were involved in Bible study in 2004), a home for pregnant teens and planting 65 churches in Florida and around the world.

Ministry Context

Approximately 168,000 people reside in the city of Fort Lauderdale. Some would call it a taste of paradise with its ocean views and yacht-filled waterways on one side and the exotic Everglades on the other. A short drive away is the metropolitan area of Miami. Broward County is home to 1.8 million residents. It is an ethnically diverse culture: 49% of residents are white, 24% are African American, and 22% are Hispanic.¹

Thirty-two percent of the county's work force is in management or professional positions followed closely by 31% working in sales and office position. Twenty-five percent of residents are under the age of 17 and on any given day in South Florida, there are three to four thousand temporary orphans in foster care.

Calvary Chapel in Brief

Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale began in 1985 through the church planting efforts of Senior Pastor Bob Coy and the Calvary Chapel movement, now 1,300 churches strong.

CCFL is a vibrant body of believers more than 18,000 strong. Its parishioners are as diverse as the county itself. The main campus is located in Fort Lauderdale while their two satellite campuses are in Boca Raton and Plantation. They have both Saturday evening and Sunday morning worship services and a thriving mid-week service.

Calvary Chapel on Mission: 4KIDS of South Florida

4KIDS of South Florida

VISION

Providing Hope for Kids in Crisis

Core Values

Sacrifice – Focusing to keep God first and to serve children and families in every aspect of our work, without thought to self.

Perseverance – Continuing steadfastly in all our efforts to make a positive difference in the lives of the children and families whom we serve, and never giving up.

Integrity – Adhering to the highest ethical standards, so that everything we say and do will be above reproach.

Compassion – Understanding of the plight of the children whom we serve as the motivation behind all our efforts.

Excellence – Providing quality service and care in every phase of this ministry, with God as our standard.

¹ <http://www.broward.org/planningservices/quickfacts.htm>

Through their partnership with 4KIDS of South Florida, CCFL engages volunteers and entire families in working in the foster care system. From being foster parents to simply volunteering to mentor and teach, the church has maintained a strong emphasis on issues related to orphans for over 10 years. 4KIDS of South Florida is a separate non-profit organization with strong ties to the church.

There are 100 kids in their care on any given day. 200 volunteers participate in this ministry, and over 200 Christian families are licensed to be foster parents. Every child brought into the Broward County Child Welfare system is given loving shelter and supervision at SafePlace 4KIDS while they await a more permanent placement.

After that, children are either placed with a foster-care family or at KidsPlace Shelter, a family-style shelter for up to six kids, age 4 to 14. This shelter allows 4KIDS to keep siblings together while they await a foster home placement or reunification with a family member. A live-in couple provides care and support. Those children that are not placed with a foster-care family or family member are welcomed into GirlsPlace (a home for teenage girls), GuysPlace and GuysPlace 2 (homes for teenage boys), and KidsPlace 2 (a home for sibling groups and children who are difficult to place).

CCFL and 4KIDS of South Florida also work in tandem with two additional non-profit organizations that were launched from the church. His Caring Place (www.hiscaringplace.org) provides a safe harbor for pregnant teenagers and Adoption 4KIDS (www.adoption4KIDSofsfl.org) matches courageous birthparents with committed Christian families, providing stable, hope-filled homes for children facing an uncertain future.

Another aspect of this ministry to foster children is CCFL's commitment to help other churches get involved in foster care solutions. To date, there are 140 churches that are involved or partnering with CCFL and 4KIDS of South Florida.

How did this church of 18,000 organize such a comprehensive, large-scale effort so effectively?

Step One: Respond to the Need

Along with the headlines shouting the need for a better foster care system in Florida, individuals from CCFL were also becoming personally concerned and engaged. Irene Garbowski was personally touched by the tragedies taking place in her community. She knocked on any pastor's door who would listen and educated herself on the foster care system, trusting God would open up people's hearts and provide for the orphans in the community. The pastors at Calvary Church Fort Lauderdale listened to her heart and empowered her to start this ministry through staffing and office space.

This grassroots foster-care ministry was initially called ChildSHARE. Over the years, the name changed to Project Teamwork 4KIDS, and finally, 4KIDS of South Florida, but the mission of "providing hope for kids in crisis" has always remained the same.

Step Two: Planned Abandonment

“We were planning on building a Christian school in 1997, but our plans changed,” recalls Doug Sauder, Pastor of Family Ministries. To focus on the foster care issues facing their community, the church temporarily abandoned the idea of building the school and refocused instead on communication and funding to foster children in Broward County. “Children need *homes* first!” exclaimed Senior Pastor Bob Coy from the pulpit one Sunday.

By delaying the start-up of the Christian school project for a year, the church was able to initially add four people to staff for the foster care ministry start-up. Now, this ministry is its own non-profit with a staff of 70. The church did eventually continue on with the Christian school project and today the school itself is a ministry to foster parents and children. “Foster kids are welcome at the school and we work hard to scholarship their needs,” says Doug.

Step Three: Partner with Others

Seeing the need to draw in other churches and faith-based providers throughout the tri-county area, 4KIDS birthed “Churches United for Foster Care” in December 2002. This initiative now facilitates the involvement of more than one hundred organizations to care for the modern-day orphans in the state of Florida. “We have vision luncheons with other Florida pastors and their wives, sharing the mandate of Scripture to care for orphans as well as teach them how they can be a part of the solution as well,” explains Doug. At these meetings, 4KIDS and CCFL are not worried about gaining financial support for the ministry as much as they are prayer and volunteer support. Doug enthuses, “We tell them, we don’t need your money. We need your people to love and care for orphans.”

CCFL has developed a set a tools, empowering local churches to start their own residential homes for kids in need. “We train and take on liability so that a church can integrate a ministry to foster children into the life of their own church. It’s sort of a franchise model,” says Doug.

In 2006, Calvary Church made 32 presentations to congregations, yielding 33 new families involved in the licensing process, 53 new homes licensed, and 53 children placed in ministry-based, foster care settings.

4KIDS PARADIGM of Ministry to Foster Children

Protection

SafePlace 4KIDS provides shelter and supervision for *all* of Broward County’s abused, abandoned, and neglected children when they are initially removed from their families. Our trained, qualified, and screened staff members and volunteers provide encouragement, guidance, and every amenity available to help the child learn to trust and laugh again. One of the *only* programs of its kind in the State of Florida, SafePlace 4KIDS welcomes children, *newborn to 18 years of age*, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Provision

Foster children are placed in one of our 4KIDS of South Florida shelters

Permanent Solutions

The children are transitioned from the shelter to a Christian foster home.

Sustaining the Outreach Arm

Calvary Chapel itself budgets \$300-400,000 annually to support 4KIDS, but 4KIDS is also actively involved in fundraising. One of its special projects is the “foster care kids calendar” that is sold each year to celebrate the ministry and raise awareness and funds.

To maintain enthusiasm for the ministry, there are celebration stories and information about 4KIDS in the church bulletin, as well as dedicated pages and links on Calvary’s dynamic church web site. “We also have two or three small announcements in the service over the course of the year. Then we have one huge announcement annually, really helping people get connected to the ministry,” says Doug.

Although 4KIDS of South Florida is its own non-profit, the church is tightly connected to the organization, helping support it as though it is part of their family ministry at CCFL. As Family Ministry Pastor, Doug is also president of 4KIDS and serves on the Board of Directors. Other staff members also work within both the ministry of the church and 4KIDS.

Challenges

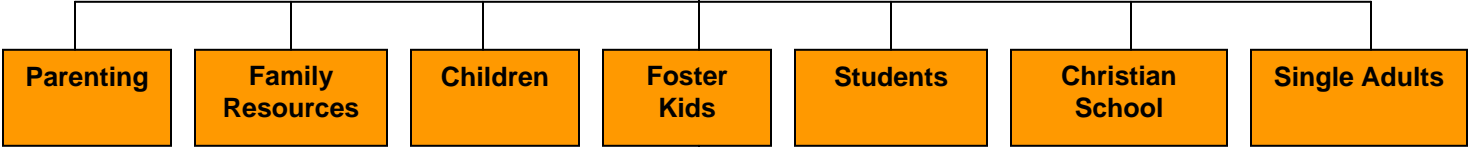
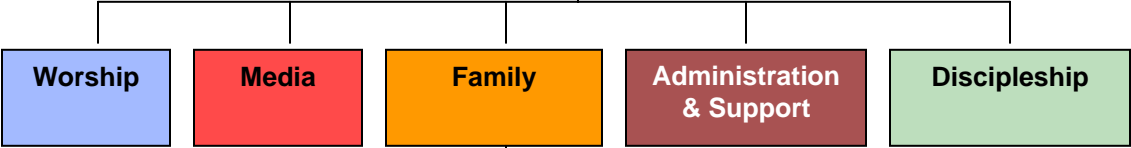
Parenting a child is a lifetime commitment, so getting members involved can be challenging. “Foster parenting can be scary, but once you see the kids and begin to work through the issues, it is very rewarding,” says Doug—who is a foster parent himself. Doug notes that the tipping point for more families getting involved is the foster parents themselves. “Through conversation and rubbing shoulder with foster parents, our people become interested and involved,” he acknowledges. The church offers numerous training opportunities, support groups, and classes to help people with their decision to become foster or adoptive parents.

Internal Benefits of an External Focus

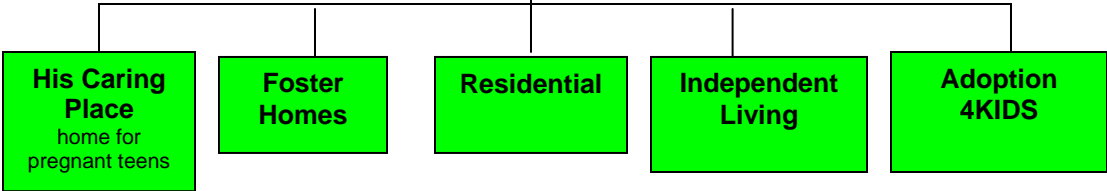
“Spiritually, our ministry to foster kids adds a vibrancy to the church,” says Doug. Having foster kids in the classrooms of the church’s Christian school and at the church summer camps, as well as having foster parents in the adults’ Sunday School classes, brings a dose of reality to the Scriptural call to care for orphans. “Teaching a class full of children from the church is semi-inspiring to our Sunday School teachers, but interacting with our foster kids during the time adds a sense of reality to outreach that isn’t normally found,” says Doug.

Krista Petty is a coach for Externally Focused Churches and writer for Group Publishing and Leadership Network. Most recently, she served as editor of *The Externally Focused Church* (Group Publishing) and *Living a Life on Loan* (Standard Publishing). She resides in Johnstown, Colorado with her husband, Steve, and three great kids. The Petty’s are active members of LifeBridge Christian Church. Comments or questions for the author can be sent to krista_petty@msn.com.

Calvary Chapel of Fort Lauderdale
led by Pastor Bob Coy



4KIDS of South Florida



3 Views

What is 4KIDS of South Florida? Ask this question in Ft. Lauderdale and here are three responses you might receive.

Community

This organization has come to the rescue by helping us have quality foster care options. It is helping our social services system operate more effectively for families.

Church

This is a part of our Family Ministry at Calvary Church. We support it financially as well as through many of our members being foster parents or volunteers in the ministry. This is one way we live out the mandate of Scripture to care for orphans.

Children & Families

This place is our home...or they find us one. Sometimes we stay in their group homes until they can find us the right foster parents or adoptive parents. Sometimes, we get to go back with our moms and dads and they often join the church because they see how much 4KIDS people have cared about us while we were with them.