

# 20<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY DISTINGUISHED PANEL OF EXPERTS

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Recommendations to Scale the  
Wendy's Wonderful Kids Model



DAVE THOMAS  
FOUNDATION  
FOR ADOPTION®

Finding Forever Families for Children in Foster Care

January, 2013



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## I. Introduction and Purpose

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption (“DTFA” or “Foundation”) is a national nonprofit public charity established in 1992 with the mission to “dramatically increase the number of adoptions of waiting children from North America’s foster care systems.” Created by Wendy’s® founder Dave Thomas who was adopted, the Foundation implements evidence-based, results-driven national service programs, foster care adoption awareness campaigns and advocacy initiatives.

In 2004, DTFA launched its *Wendy’s Wonderful Kids* (“WWK”) initiative, in partnership with Wendy’s. By developing and leveraging a child-based recruitment model, WWK has helped 3,079\* children find permanent, loving homes in North America...and the number continues to grow. Recently-released research from a five-year evaluation of Wendy’s Wonderful Kids shows that children referred to the program are up to *three times more likely to get adopted*.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the success of WWK, the need is increasing. Each year, thousands of children enter foster care through no fault of their own – as victims of abuse, neglect or abandonment – and are subsequently permanently removed from their homes because their birth families are unable or unwilling to provide safe environments for them. Currently, there are more than 104,000 children in foster care in the U.S. waiting to be adopted.<sup>2</sup>

The Foundation is eager to scale its successful WWK model to drastically increase the number of children adopted from foster care in North America. As DTFA celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, its leaders recognize that scaling the model requires participation from a broad and diverse group of disciplines. Therefore, the Foundation recruited a panel of distinguished experts to contribute their time, talent and knowledge to the effort. *The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption’s 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Panel of Distinguished Experts* represents leaders in the areas of philanthropy, child welfare, human services, branding, adoption, health care, media, public affairs, higher education, business and government. In July, 2012, the group met in Washington, D.C. Panel members were provided background about the Foundation and were briefed about the WWK recruitment model. Based on this information and their expertise, the group developed recommendations to expand the WWK model. The panel identified recommendations related to funding, communication and policy. This document contains these findings and recommendations.

(\*As of August, 2012)

## II. Panel Members

The following are the members of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Distinguished Panel of Experts:

**MaryLee Allen**

*Director of Child Welfare and Mental Health  
Children's Defense Fund*

**Robert W. Block, MD, FAAP**

*Professor of Pediatrics  
University of Oklahoma School of Community  
Medicine in Tulsa  
President  
American Academy of Pediatrics*

**Carol Emig**

*President & CEO  
Child Trends*

**Rob Geen**

*Director, Family Services and Systems Policy,  
Research and Communications  
The Annie E. Casey Foundation*

**Kathy Postel Kretman, Ph.D.**

*Director & Research Professor  
Center for Public & Nonprofit Leadership  
Georgetown University*

**Senator Mary Landrieu**

*(D) Louisiana  
United States Senate*

**Jim Margolis**

*Founding Partner  
GMMB*

*DTFA Executive:*

**Rita L. Soronen**

*President & CEO  
Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption  
716 Mt. Airyshire Blvd., Suite 100*

*Facilitator:*

**Ann T. Gallagher**

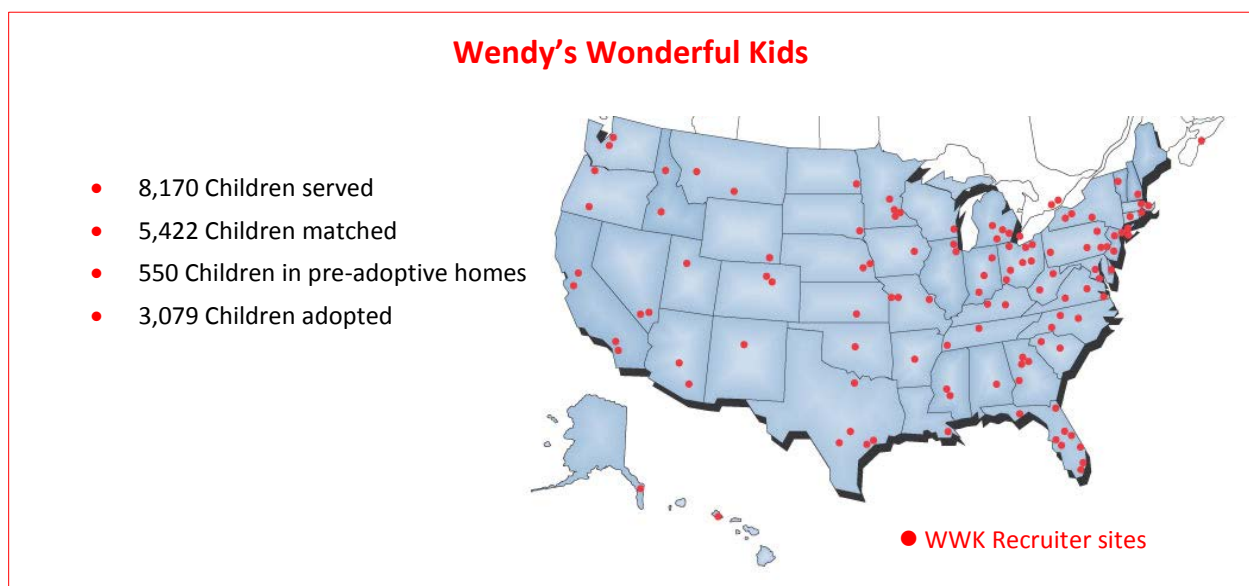
*President  
Gallagher Consulting Group*

### III. Overview: Wendy's Wonderful Kids Program

DTFA designed and implemented WWK in 2004 to increase adoptions from foster care, focusing on children for whom it has traditionally been difficult to find adoptive families. Through WWK, DTFA awards grants to public and private adoption agencies to hire adoption professionals who implement proactive, child-focused recruitment programs targeted exclusively on moving America's longest-waiting children from foster care into adoptive families.

A five-year evaluation conducted Child Trends in Washington, D.C. in 2011, proves the WWK model works. The findings show that a child served by a Wendy's Wonderful Kids recruiter is 1.7 times more likely to be adopted than a child not served by Wendy's Wonderful Kids.<sup>3</sup> For older children, the impact of the WWK model is greater (up to 3 times more likely).<sup>4</sup> Children with mental health disorders are more than 3 times more likely to be adopted when served by WWK than those not served by a WWK recruiter.<sup>5</sup> Others have recognized the success of WWK. In 2007, DTFA was awarded the Adoption Excellence from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for WWK.<sup>6</sup>

So far, WWK has 148 recruiters working for children throughout the U.S. and Canada. The program has helped more than 3,000 children get adopted by their forever families.



## IV. Recommendations to Scale the WWK Model

The panel categorized its recommendations to expand the WWK model into functional areas;

- 1) Funding
- 2) Communication & Outreach
- 3) Public Policy

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### A. Funding

Panel members recommend that DTFA create and implement a diverse funding strategy with corporate, foundation, individual and government donors. They believe that in order to greatly expand the model, DTFA will need to be much more aggressive, and adapt its infrastructure to secure necessary funds.

#### 1. Continue to leverage and expand the partnership with Wendy's.

Expert panel members applaud The Wendy's Company and its entire franchise community for its instrumental, ongoing and strong support of DTFA. The group encourages DTFA to deepen this partnership to increase funding to scale the WWK model. Panel members recommend that DTFA work with Wendy's to increase financial support and visibility of the WWK model by leveraging the company's current networks including the restaurants, advertising, marketing/packaging, and digital communication to solicit donations. They also suggest that the Foundation continue its ongoing cultivation of the Wendy's franchise community. Experts feel that Wendy's can leverage its vendor network more effectively to secure additional funding and visibility for the WWK. One participant noted that this could be a marketing opportunity for the vendor as well. *"Doing a joint-promotion with Wendy's to benefit WWK is a 'no-brainer' for a vendor because they can get good press, contribute to a great cause and make their client happy all at the same time."*

#### 2. Aggressively pursue public funding from federal and state levels.

While corporate and private support is crucial, the panel recommends that DTFA explore federal and state funding opportunities. The panel strongly believes that scaling the WWK model to the level in which it can drastically increase the number of foster care adoptions can only occur with the aid of public funding. As one expert said, *"Adoption is – and likely will always be – a government function."*

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Panel members noted that evidence-based success models, like WWK, are viewed favorably by public funders. They encourage DTFA to leverage its proven model by educating officials about its success.

### 2.1 State funding:

The panel reasoned that because states regulate domestic adoption, they should support a proven, child-focused model, like WWK. They cited the State of Ohio as an example in which public officials understand the fiscal and social value of WWK. Ohio has committed more than \$2 million to expand the model in the state.

The panel recommends the following actions to DTFA to help garner additional state support:

- *Develop and demonstrate fiscal savings model at the state level.*
- *Help states conduct a self-assessment to understand its true status of foster care and adoption.*
- *Target states with list of longest waiting children in foster care.*

*The panel strongly believes that scaling the WWK model to the level in which it can drastically increase the number of foster care adoptions can only occur with the aid of public funding.*

### 2.2 Federal funding:

The majority of the panel experts are knowledgeable about federal government and funding. The group agrees there are federal funds available for best practice models which benefit at-risk children. As one member said, “*There is an appetite and need at the national level for solutions like this which will help our most vulnerable children.*” The panel believes that if the proper federal officials are made aware of the evidence-based WWK model, the adoption results, and the cost savings it produces, that funding could be secured.

The panel recommends the following actions to DTFA to help garner federal support:

- *Customize and ‘package’ the WWK success story for federal officials*
- *Leverage existing contacts/relationships to schedule briefing(s) with officials at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and communicate about WWK*
- *Target Title IV funding*

- *Explore social investment bonds funding option*
- *Show broad support of WWK model and share list of entities (e.g., State of Ohio, adoption experts, etc.*

### **3. Secure funding from major foundations which favor “evidence-based” programs.**

In addition to government funders, there is a national trend among major foundations to support evidence-based programs.<sup>7</sup> Panel members recommend that DTFA make a coordinated effort to inform these granting entities about the model’s proven track record and its positive social, financial and community impact. The group acknowledges it can be difficult to access these foundations and applauded DTFA for its past efforts. Again, the experts strongly recommend that DTFA identify and leverage all of its relationships to help gain entry into targeted foundations.

*“There is an appetite and need at the national level for solutions like this (WWK) which will help our most vulnerable children.” - Panel Member*

### **4. Explore other corporate funding and/or affiliations.**

While the economic downturn has affected all philanthropy, corporate giving still totaled \$14.55 billion in 2011.<sup>8</sup> The group believes there is potential in tapping corporations for funding and/or cause-marketing partnerships to benefit DTFA and Wendy’s. Like the previous suggestion of joint-promotions with Wendy’s vendors, the group thinks there is merit in securing similar arrangements with other corporate partners.



## B. Communication and Outreach

When panel members were briefed about WWK and the research, they were impressed with its successful outcomes. They agree that one of the important initiatives to scale the model is to educate and inform stakeholders about WWK and its track record. One expert commented, *“Before this panel, I was completely unaware of Wendy’s Wonderful Kids and already I am fully supportive and ready to help. I have to believe that others will feel the same way.”* The panel was complimentary of DTFA’s communication materials and wants the Foundation to continue its ongoing communication efforts. However, to significantly scale the WWK model, they feel there is a great need to boost current education, communication and outreach efforts. Several of the recommendations share a common theme of recruiting and leveraging others to help increase awareness and influence.

### 1. Leverage stakeholders/friends to help “tell the WWK story.”

The panel noted that DTFA has built strong, loyal relationships with its various stakeholder groups. To expand the WWK model and maximize resources, they recommend using key stakeholders to serve as ambassadors to help tell the WWK story. They encourage DTFA to develop relevant talking points and brief stakeholders about how to explain and WWK and share their personal stories. Some of the stakeholders they identified as ambassadors include:

- *WWK recruiters*
- *WWK adoptive families/parents*
- *Like-minded child welfare and family organizations*
- *Board of directors*
- *Wendy’s employees*
- *Funders (i.e. franchisee, State of Ohio-Gov., other)*
- *Expert panel members*

### 2. Identify and recruit potential “circle of champions” for WWK.

Similar to the expert panel concept, the group suggests the DTFA consider developing an advisory group of leaders and influencers with representatives from key stakeholder groups. This would not only include the stakeholder groups listed above, but also other organizations, nonprofits, businesses, and

entertainment/sports groups (e.g. Volunteers of America, National Urban League, State Farm Insurance, the NFL). The advisory committee can be used to help increase visibility, raise funds and provide input. Expert participants said that in order for this kind of group to be effective, each member must have specific roles, responsibilities and task(s) to perform.

### **3. Expand outreach beyond current stakeholder groups.**

In addition to leveraging its current stakeholders, panel members believe there is great value for DTFA to reach beyond the child advocacy arena to gain support for scaling the model. Specifically, the panel identified synergies with the scientific and health care communities as potential allies. As stated previously, the group thinks it is important to demonstrate that foster care adoption is not an isolated issue. Instead, it is part of a bigger life course with health, community and financial impacts.

### **4. Develop list of organizations and key individuals who endorse WWK to demonstrate broad support.**

The panel feels it is valuable for the Foundation to create a list of organizations and key individuals who “sign on” to show broad support for the WWK model. They believe that this list could be helpful in efforts to increase awareness, advocate and secure new donors.

### **5. Develop and implement intensive “road show” campaign targeting top influencers.**

The panel recommends that DTFA focus its communication and outreach efforts on educating key policy influencers, funders, media, and direct service providers about the recruitment model, the research findings and the vision for expanding WWK. It suggests enhancing its “road show” campaign with a compelling presentation to share with targeted influencers.

### **6. Promote the WWK model to evidence-based research organizations.**

The panel noted that there is a growing movement among the research community to collect, showcase and share best practices from multiple disciplines. Major funders, the nonprofit community, and the public sector are looking to these organizations to learn more about potential grantees which employ best practices. The group suggest that DTFA make efforts to promote the WWK model among these

research organizations. They feel these groups can give DTFA credibility to help increase funding and create more awareness.

## C. Policy

The group believes that many levels and branches of government are instrumental to the expansion of the WWK model. However, they recommend that the DTFA focus its resources on targeting the federal (especially U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and state levels. The panel believes these sectors should support the WWK model by working to create more favorable policies and regulations and through financial support. The policy effort must also include direct communication with the child welfare professionals and social workers who work with at-risk youth.

### 1. Educate child welfare professionals about WWK and the benefits of adoption.

Several panel members have experience with a myriad of child welfare issues. They strongly believe that in order to successfully scale the WWK model, DTFA must educate social workers and child welfare professionals. They encourage DTFA to educate state administrators about the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of WWK, and how it can help their states. They also suggest educating front-line workers about the benefits of adoption and reinforce that adoption is good for kids. As one panel member said, “The child welfare community needs to be on board to scale the model.” This includes national foster care groups and adoption directors. The group also recommends disseminating information about the WWK model to the schools of social work in higher education.

*“The child welfare community needs to be on board to scale the model.” Panel Member*

### 2. Focus state efforts on educating administrators and securing funds.

As stated in previous recommendations, the group recommends DTFA engage with states by focusing on educating child welfare administrators and seeking state-specific funding. The majority feel expanding beyond these areas would diffuse DTFA’s focus on the WWK model expansion.

### 3. Continue federal advocacy activities with emphasis on US Department of Health and Human Services.

Participants feel DTFA should continue its federal advocacy efforts. While they understand that adoption is regulated at the state level, they feel the connections and visibility the Foundation has

cultivated at the national level are critical for its ongoing success. The panel recommends that DTFA leaders leverage its relationships to foster stronger relationships with leaders in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The majority agree that the administrative and fiscal support of the agency is essential to scale WWK.

## V. Conclusion

The 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Distinguished Panel of Experts was impressed by DTFA's commitment and the results the organization has achieved to date. They were especially excited about DTFA's innovative and game-changing efforts that are making the difference in lives of thousands of children. The group believes that DTFA is uniquely-positioned to leverage its voice, credibility and its evidence-based best practices to change the landscape of foster care adoption in North America. But they understand that the journey will not be easy. They encourage DTFA to be robust in its communication and outreach efforts to secure the proper resources to scale the WWK model. The panel agreed to continue to serve as a resource for the Foundation as it advances its mission.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> *A National Evaluation of Wendy's Wonderful Kids*, Child Trends. October 2011. <http://www.davethomasfoundation.org>.
- <sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) Preliminary FY 2011 Estimates as of July 2011 (19).
- <sup>3</sup> *A National Evaluation of Wendy's Wonderful Kids*, Child Trends. October 2011, p. 11. <http://www.davethomasfoundation.org>.
- <sup>4</sup> *A National Evaluation of Wendy's Wonderful Kids*, Child Trends. October 2011, p. 14. <http://www.davethomasfoundation.org>.
- <sup>5</sup> *A National Evaluation of Wendy's Wonderful Kids*, Child Trends. October 2011, p. 14. <http://www.davethomasfoundation.org>.
- <sup>6</sup> *From Action to Awareness: A Case Study of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption's Philanthropic Strategy*, Francie Ostrower, Ph.D., September, 2010. The Urban Institute
- <sup>7</sup> *Exploring the Role of Funders' Performance Reporting Mandates in Nonprofit Performance Measurement Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector*, Quarterly August 1, 2010 39: 611-629 <http://arp.sagepub.com/content/39/4/374>
- <sup>8</sup> Giving USA: Figures on American Philanthropy, 2011. American Association of Fundraising Counsel,

A large, faint watermark of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption logo is centered on the page. It consists of a stylized black figure with arms raised inside a white heart shape, all set against a red square background.

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