



Introduction

This executive summary of key principles outlined in the forthcoming Communities of Hope Faith-Based Toolkit and sample tools are being provided to participants in the Deaconess Foundation's 2018 Just for Kids Community Conversations series. It is being shared with faith and community leaders committed to helping preserve families and protect the well-being of children.

The ultimate goal of the toolkit is to provide guidance and support for faith organizations and faith communities that value the family institution and are committed to family strengthening. This includes but is not limited to:

- Families facing limited opportunities to provide adequate food, housing or economic opportunities for themselves;
- Families that have become or are at risk of becoming fractured by the separation of children from their birth parents or siblings through foster care or adoption;
- Families living on the margins as a result of incarceration, addiction, homelessness or mental health issues; and
- Families that have been separated or whose lives have been disrupted by natural or man-made disasters.



Five principles for **effective practice**



Envision a new environment through faith in action

Visionary leaders are able to look at a community whose residents live in trying conditions and imagine an improved, renewed community, with those same residents living in safe, healthy, caring homes.

Faith-based leaders who are committed to serving and supporting children and families hold such a vision of hope while maintaining a realistic view of the current state of families in their community. Gaining an understanding of the challenges children and families face, they draw from the tenets of their faith to believe in the possibility of a new environment at a macro level while simultaneously creating a plan of action at a micro level.



Integrate faith into practice

Effective faith-based organizations (FBOs) integrate their faith into their ministries, outreach or programs in ways that are inclusive and strategic. The members of the faith community know that everyone is a “work in progress” and that expressing faith with love is more powerful than being judgmental. This same attitude of love and compassion is expressed in their community outreach and the services they provide to children and families.

Faith communities integrate their faith by providing services in their ministries and outreach programs regardless of whether the children or families join their church, temple or mosque. They operate with the understanding that their work, love and compassion are impactful because they are living out the tenets of their faith.



Faith informs successful collaboration and partnership

The social and economic challenges families face are complex and vast. We know that one church, temple, mosque, ministry or nonprofit cannot tackle these complexities alone. Therefore, collaboration and partnership are key tools for developing successful, holistic and efficient outreach and ministry.

It is easy to see how the character values found in faith traditions such as respect, integrity and unwavering commitment can translate into a successful partnership for

children and families. Mutual respect between faith-based organizations creates a sense of harmony that leads to efficient services and programs for families. Integrity ensures that each partner or collaborator is doing their part, which helps maintain a high level of positive energy and excitement about the work. Unwavering commitment to mutual goals creates synergy when challenges arise and keeps each organization focused on solutions.



Engage youth authentically

All religious doctrines honor the voices of children and youth and teach them characteristics and morals of faith. In the community work of FBOs and ministries, engaging and incorporating the voices of youth is not only a best practice but very rewarding, offering multiple advantages to both groups. FBOs benefit from the creativity and innovation that the youth voice brings to program planning and community development, while youth receive an opportunity to gain leadership and employment skills, as well as an understanding of civic responsibility.



Consider faith leaders' voices and roles in community

Faith leaders have one of the most unique positions in society because of the inherent trust they hold with those among their congregational community, ministry or nonprofit, as well as with the larger community. Their unique voice can be used inside and outside of the walls of their faith community as powerful impetuses for positive change.

Let us consider some of the ways faith leaders can use their voice for change. One of the easiest ways is to teach, preach or use their voice to highlight their responsibility to be agents of change. Faith leaders can also bring awareness and clarity to the plight of vulnerable children and families in the community by sharing information in the form of quantitative data on trends affecting families and qualitative data (stories) about families in their community. Inspiring and thoughtful messages from faith leaders can lead to corporate inspiration and innovation to form new ministries or outreach initiatives. Faith leaders can also help change messaging about how family is defined by highlighting and creating ministries that engage and support blended families or “kinship families” (families where grandparents or other relatives, playing the role of “kinship caregivers,” take care of children whose parents are unable to care for them).