
DANIEL COMMUNITY SCHOLARS PROGRAM



Foster Care Informational Summit & Roundtable

Blackburn Institute, Daniel Community Scholars Group 1

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Community Partners: Tuscaloosa Angels, Tuscaloosa County Department of Human Resources,

Mississippi Child Protective Services Rescue 100

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Abstract

This document is a proposal to the Blackburn Institute for the Daniel Community Scholars Program funding. The area of research for the proposal includes the shortage of foster families in Tuscaloosa County as compared to the number of foster children in need of a home. Contributing factors to the lack of willing foster families include a diminished awareness of the need for homes and a frustration with the laborious and prolonged process to become a certified foster family. This scarcity of suitable foster homes for children to enter within Tuscaloosa County contributes to children being placed out of the county, introducing further instability and isolation into their lives when they are [forced](#) to change schools and live hours away from any family members. The best use of DCS funds to address these challenges is to hold an informational summit in partnership with Tuscaloosa DHR. The purpose of the informational summit will give families the opportunity to hear from current foster parents, sign up to begin the certification process, as well as to host a roundtable discussion which will include key state influencers and DHR representatives in which a successful, expedited certification program in Mississippi for foster families is examined. In addition, to inform families who are unable to foster a child, of the many other opportunities there are to help improve the lives of children who end up in the system. Community partners for both events include Tuscaloosa Angels, Mississippi Child Protective Services Rescue 100 Program, and Tuscaloosa's Department of Human Resources. Further description of each community partner, as well as the implementation and budget proposals, are included in this document.

Evidence of Need

Shortage of foster families in Tuscaloosa County

Each team members' personal experience with an aspect of the foster care system has individually motivated them to tackle the lack of foster homes in Alabama and our local community. These experiences may have been through ministry work or growing up with household exposure to foster care, however, each member has witnessed first-hand the need for a greater number of foster homes in Alabama.

A Tuscaloosa County [study](#) from 2018 highlighted the need for almost four times more foster parents than are currently available in the county. It pointed out that there are approximately 30 available foster families in Tuscaloosa County whereas there are around 138 children in foster care from the area (Iloka). As a result of the shortage of foster homes, a majority of children are displaced and end up in other counties around the state. DHR officials emphasize the importance of keeping a child in the most stable environment as possible. When a child is moved from their home county to the next they leave behind everything in life that they call home, which can lead to innumerable [consequences](#), such as detachment issues with their new families. A [study](#) done from 2012 to 2017 shows that the number of "non-relative licensed" foster homes in the state of Alabama decreased by 107. At the same time the number of children in foster care in Alabama has gone from 4,561 in 2012 to 6,050 in 2017, while the number of available non-relative foster homes has steadily decreased (Kelly 14). 20% of youth in the Alabama foster care system are placed in a group home instead of with a foster family, making Alabama's rate of group home placements 7% higher than the national average ("Foster Care Facts in Alabama"). These statistics demonstrate the alarming gap between the supply and demand for foster families in the state of Alabama, which continues to widen each year.

According to the Alabama Department of Human Resources website, the requirements to become a foster parent are as follows:

- You are at least 19 years of age.
- You can provide a safe, comfortable atmosphere for the child.
- Your home conforms to Alabama Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes.
- Your home has enough space for the child and his or her belongings.
- All members of your family are willing to share their home with a child who needs care.
- All members of your family are in good health.
- All adults in the home are willing to undergo a thorough background check, including criminal history.

(“Introduction to Foster Care”)

Community Partners

Our project’s community partners include Tuscaloosa Angels, Mississippi Child Protective Services Rescue 100 Program, and Tuscaloosa’s Department of Human Resources.

Tuscaloosa Angels is the local branch of a national organization called National Angels. Tuscaloosa Angels's mission is to "walk alongside children in the foster care system, as well as their caretakers, by offering consistent support through intentional giving, relationship building, and mentorship" (tuscaloosaangels.org). They achieve this mission through several initiatives to support local foster families, including the delivery of "Love Boxes" and the creation of a "Dare to Dream" mentoring program. Tuscaloosa Angels will contribute to our informational summit by informing potential foster parents of the resources available should they choose to foster. They will also be able to share relative information at our roundtable discussion based on their knowledge of the foster system and add credibility to our panel.

Rescue 100 is a division of Mississippi Child Protective Services that operates as a non-profit to streamline the training and licensing process for foster families. According to their website, "Rescue 100 trains and equips foster families through online training courses and a 1-day training to expedite licensing their homes so they can care for children in need of a stable and loving home environment" (mdcps.ms.gov). Over the course of the first weekend of the Rescue 100 program, 50 families were trained to become certified foster homes. CPS then performed home visits over the course of the next few weeks. Once the home studies were completed, the families were certified to begin fostering.

Tuscaloosa's Department of Human Resources is the agency responsible for the certification of foster families and the placement of foster children into these families. DHR is a key partner as any lasting, structural change to decrease the prolonged process of becoming a foster family must be supported and approved by DHR. DHR will be involved in answering the policy and recruitment related questions of the certification process at our informational summit. They will also be available to assist any families or individuals that decide to begin the

certification process. DHR will also be a critical component of our roundtable discussion with Mississippi's Rescue 100 Program, as they will be able to voice their concerns and ask technical questions about the implementation of a similar program in Alabama.

We will also be inviting other organizations and individuals including the Heart Gallery, Tuscaloosa Foster Parent Association, local churches, current foster parents, and other experts to participate in our informational summit. At our roundtable discussion, we will be inviting key elected officials and foster care advocates throughout the state of Alabama to share their perspectives and increase interest in an expedited licensing program.

Project Activities

Project Proposal: Due to the research that shows the lack of available foster parents in Tuscaloosa County, we have proposed to host a Parent and Family information session to educate potential foster parents, and provide an opportunity to take initial training steps. Additionally, we would like to provide a roundtable discussion with state leaders to promote a future expedited vetting process modeled after Mississippi's successful Rescue 100 project. Our team plans on partnering with Tuscaloosa DHR and Tuscaloosa Angels to show prospective foster parents the resources available to them, answer questions and incentivize community members to take action.

Development of Project

1. **Recruitment:** First we would like to make the Tuscaloosa community aware of the issue and recruit prospective families to attend an information session.
 - a. The first step of recruitment includes reaching out to Tuscaloosa Angels and the Foster Parent Association in Tuscaloosa to leverage the connections they have with current foster parents in the community. DHR personnel cite word of mouth as the most effective means of obtaining interest and beginning the certification process to become a foster parent.
 - b. DHR personnel also cite successful incentive programs as a way to recruit families. We plan on using these suggestions by providing incentives to current foster parents when they recommend a family that attends our interest session. We also plan on providing and advertising incentives to those families who complete the 10 week certification process.
 - c. Next, Blackburn Students will be educated on the specific need for foster families in Tuscaloosa, barriers the community faces that might account for the disparity, and minimum standards to become certified. We then plan to leverage each student's unique position within the community by providing them with promotional materials and tasking them with contacting two local churches,

businesses and/or University of Alabama faculty and staff members to recruit potential foster parents to attend our interest session.

- d. Returning students, fellows and advisory board members would also be educated on the issue and encouraged to utilize their connections within the Tuscaloosa community to increase attendance, but ultimately spread awareness of the issue and resources available.
 - e. An electronic RSVP form for the summit will be used to collect contact information and other details such as child care needs and referrals.
2. **Roundtable:** We will begin by inviting key elected officials and foster care advocates throughout the state of Alabama to share their perspectives and increase interest in an expedited licensing program.
 - a. The goal is to start a statewide discussion to draw attention to the lack of foster parents throughout the state and alternate certification processes to address this shortage. We hope to incentivize new foster parents in the future by advocate for an expedited certification process.
 3. **Fundraising:** If selected, monetary donations will not be necessary in order to host the event. However, we will promote donations to our community partners throughout the recruitment process and during the informational summit as a path of action to support the overall goal.

Project Logistics

1. **Event activities:** The summit will consist of each community partner informing the prospective parents of their role with the foster care system, what issues they are working to address, and the many ways the audience could help. After each community partner and testimonial is presented, we will have each person who spoke on a panel for a general Q & A before guests are invited to visit tables for more information and in-depth conversations. Informational packets about the process of becoming a foster parent and promotional materials from all community partners will be provided at event check-in.
 - a. Tuscaloosa DHR representatives will be speaking about the need in the community, the process of becoming a foster parent, address common

misconceptions, and provide personal testimonials. They will also provide interested families an opportunity to start the certification process at their table.

- b. The Tuscaloosa Angels will present on ways they support individuals involved in the foster care system and the variety of resources they provide.
 - c. The Heart Gallery will present on adoption through foster care as an option compared to fostering and the resources available in Tuscaloosa.
 - d. The Tuscaloosa Foster Parent Association will present on the different programs and opportunities they have to support new foster parents. Specifically, we hope to highlight their mentorship program that pairs current foster parents with new families to guide and support them throughout the process.
2. **Volunteer management:** DCS Team 1 will be in charge of facilitating volunteer assignments and coordinating other event logistics.
- a. As mentioned above, volunteers from Blackburn students, fellows, advisory board members and our community partners will be tasked with recruiting attendees for the summit and spreading awareness throughout the community.
 - b. 10-15 volunteers from the Blackburn 2019 class will be needed for each of the three time shifts on the day of the event. Tasks include:
 - i. Setting up the event before guests arrive and helping community partners with tabling
 - ii. Working the check-in table and assisting with name-tags
 - iii. Guiding the flow of guests into the event as it begins
 - iv. Assisting with technology during the presentations
 - v. Being available before, during and after the event to answer any questions from guests
 - vi. Clean-up throughout and after the event and assisting community partners with packing up their tables
 - c. DHR's volunteers will be asked to provide childcare for guests during the event because they will have a background check on file. The number will be determined after RSVPs are received.
3. **Food:** Food will be provided at both the foster care informational summit and roundtable discussion.

- a. Informational summit: Bama dining will provide appetizers, deserts and light refreshments throughout the event for guests as they have time to talk and network. With the event being held at 3 p.m., dinner or heavier meal options are not necessary.
 - b. Roundtable discussion: Lunch and refreshments will be provided to guests
4. **Media**: Digital media will be utilized throughout the entire project implementation.
- a. Pre-Event
 - i. Email will be the main form of contact with community partners, the Blackburn community and prospective foster parents.
 - ii. A digital form will be used to RSVP for both events.
 - iii. Students, community partners, and members of the Blackburn community will be encouraged to promote the event through social media.
 - iv. Involved groups will be provided with promotional materials for the event and all of the community partners.
 - v. A powerpoint presentation on the event will be provided to members who would like to use it for recruitment.
 - b. Post-Event
 - i. Media coverage of the event will be encouraged by sending out a media advisory including key facts, community partner recognition, and involvement of government or university officials.
 - ii. Social media will be used to share highlights from the event and further recognize community partners.
 - iii. Email would be used to follow up with guests, provide more opportunities for action and thank community partners and volunteers.

5. Risk

- a. Physical: There is always a potential for unexpected injuries as a result of an accident.
- b. Emotional: With such personal investment involved from Blackburn members, community members, and partners, there is a risk of offending or possibly triggering a negative response to our efforts.

- c. Reputational: As Tuscaloosa Angels has a new presence in the community, our project has the potential to affect their reputation.
- d. Financial: There is a financial risk when it comes to sustainability of the program. While the DCS grant can cover the first event, it would rely on vendor donations to continue every year. The risk associated with this event would include the possibility that funds used to host it would not result in any new registrants, participants or effect on awareness.
- e. Environmental: There is not a significant environmental risk to our event.
- f. Communication: Promotional, educational and informational communication must be clear and consistent. There is a risk of losing credibility and confusing our target audiences if not. Pre-event communication must also be sent to thank volunteers and
- g. Timing: We hope to host the event while students are still in school,.With the timing close to fall break and the event being held on a Sunday, there is a risk of low participation.

Implementation Timeline

- December 10th, 2018
 1. Reserve rooms in the Ferguson Center for both the roundtable and informational summit.
 2. Make arrangements with catering services for both events.
- January 15th, 2020
 1. Send out confirmation emails to roundtable discussion attendees.
 2. Select moderators for discussion and 7 people for directional navigation around Ferguson Center.
- January 20th, 2020
 1. Send attendees agenda for topics and questions to be discussed during panel.
- January 26th- February 1st, 2020
 1. Have Blackburn 2019 class visit various organizations and churches to promote session.
 2. Contact media outlets and newspapers to advertise the event.
- February 20th, 2020
 1. Print name tags and information for guests.
 2. Ensure rooms and papers are set up for the round table discussion.
 3. Meet with Blackburn student moderators and Blackburn directional helpers to go over procedures for the roundtable discussion.
- February 25th, 2020
 1. DCS group 1 meets to set up room and put out information for the roundtable discussion attendees.
 2. Position and station individuals from Blackburn class around the Ferguson Center.
 3. Greet guests and usher them to the room around 10:30 am to start discussion.
 4. Lunch following catered by Bama dining with panelist and open questions for students.
- February 28th, 2020
 1. Send out confirmation emails to individuals who will be attending the summit and finalize numbers for attendees.

2. Debrief Blackburn class of 2019 on duties for the summit.
 3. Communicate with community partners, with speakers/panelist, get their numbers, pamphlets and information on what is needed.
- March 1st, 2020
 1. Meet Sunday night of the 1st. Go over feedback from roundtable discussion with class and make adjustments for how to make summit more successful.
 2. Assign volunteer positions and prepare social media posts leading up to the event
 - March 8th, 2020
 1. Arrive early for set up. 10:00 am for DCS 1 group and volunteers.
 2. Allow for check in to be set up, tables laid out and pamphlets/ informational flyers to be handed out.
 3. Begin panel approximately at 3:30 PM with speakers, followed by questions, lunch and closing statements with follow up for people to get involved who are interested in fostering or supporting families/ children.

Intended Outcomes

The ultimate purpose of our project is to help alleviate the lack of foster parents in Tuscaloosa County. Our foster care informational summit will educate the Tuscaloosa community on the lack of foster parents and then provide them with answers to questions they may have about the process. As many people are misinformed or unaware of the resources available, a recruiting process, culminating in an information session and registration opportunity, would be an efficient way to increase understanding and encourage participation in the foster care system. By informing people of the need for foster parents, in addition to what that commitment entails, we will ultimately recruit more people to take steps to start the process of becoming foster parents. Recruiting local foster parents would decrease the number of children in Tuscaloosa County that are displaced to nearby areas. If the event gets around 100 prospective parents and family members to attend, followed by 50 families beginning applications and pre-screening, this would be a significant impact on the steps to help improve the state of foster care. However, we do understand that adopting foster children may not be the most feasible outcome for some families, so we want to inform the Tuscaloosa community of other options that will drastically help. One of these options is, Tuscaloosa Angels who will speak about other opportunities to invest in foster children, be it financially or through mentorship programs. Tuscaloosa Angels operates a “Dare to Dream” mentorship program as well as monthly “Love Boxes” to support and encourage foster children.

Sustainability

The sustainability initiative in our project can be found in the proposed Roundtable event. Mississippi's Rescue 100 Program is willing to come to Tuscaloosa and share about the successes their program has seen. Rescue 100 began as a faith-based initiative in a local church, and it was so successful in increasing foster family numbers that the state's Child Protective Services ultimately took ownership of the program and developed it throughout the state. The purpose of the Roundtable is to gather key players and interested parties in the Alabama foster care system, including state and local DHR officials, constitutional officers of Alabama such as the Attorney General and Secretary of State, elected officials such as mayors and state representatives, as well as those involved in non-profit or private adoption and foster care agencies. With such deep knowledge around the table, critical questions of how to overcome obstacles to implement a similarly successful program in Alabama can commence. Mississippi's representatives can offer feedback and guidance, and Alabama representatives can ask specific questions of practicality. This Roundtable will begin a statewide conversation about the current state of our foster care system and what we can do to improve and streamline the certification process for foster families for the greater good of foster children.

Additionally, if it is proven that an event of this type is successful in recruiting foster parents, Tuscaloosa County DHR and/or Tuscaloosa Angels could decide to host the event annually. There is potential to have the event venue and much of the other costs associated donated in the future if one of our community partners decided to take over.

Budget

Group Number:	1				
Project Name:	Foster Care Informational Summit & Roundtable				
	Quantity	Revenue per Unit	Total	Running Total	Notes / Details
Revenue:					
Daniel Foundation Grant	1	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,000.00	
TOTAL REVENUE				\$ 5,000.00	
	Quantity	Expense per Unit	Total	Running Total	Notes / Details
Expenses:					
<i>Example: Supplies</i>	30	\$ 2.00	\$ 60.00	\$ 60.00	Example - Coloring Books for Classroom Activity
<i>Example: Volunteer Management</i>	50	\$ 3.00	\$ 150.00	\$ 210.00	Example - Snacks for Volunteer Training (50)
<i>Example: Ticket Costs</i>	30	\$ 5.00	\$ 150.00	\$ 360.00	Example - Zoo Field Trip for Pre-K Students (30)
<i>Example: Transportation</i>	4	\$ 60.00	\$ 240.00	\$ 600.00	Example - Shuttle Rental (4 hours) for Field Trip
INFORMATIONAL SUMMIT					
Promotional Materials	5000	\$ 0.03	\$ 125.00	\$ 125.00	Flier Handouts - Staples
Venue	1	\$ 250.00	\$ 250.00	\$ 375.00	Ferg Ballroom
Educational Materials	150	\$ 7.50	\$ 1,125.00	\$ 1,500.00	Information Booklets for Attendees
Nametags	150	\$ 0.30	\$ 45.00	\$ 1,545.00	Nametags for attendees, students, & speakers
Photographer	1	\$ 300.00	\$ 300.00	\$ 1,845.00	Take event pictures for future years
Decorations (1)	2	\$ 45.00	\$ 90.00	\$ 1,935.00	Banners - Horizontal
Decorations (2)	2	\$ 45.00	\$ 90.00	\$ 2,025.00	Banners - Vertical
Command Hooks	1	\$ 10.00	\$ 10.00	\$ 2,035.00	Hooks for banners
Classic Cheese Tray	150	\$ 3.59	\$ 538.50	\$ 2,573.50	Bama Dining
Fresh Garden Crudité	150	\$ 3.39	\$ 508.50	\$ 3,082.00	Bama Dining
Fresh Seasonal Fruit	150	\$ 3.09	\$ 463.50	\$ 3,545.50	Bama Dining
Pens	1	\$ 20.00	\$ 20.00	\$ 3,565.50	Available for note taking
Iced Water	10	\$ 2.59	\$ 25.90	\$ 3,591.40	Refreshments - Bama Dining
Iced Tea	5	\$ 17.99	\$ 89.95	\$ 3,681.35	Refreshments - Bama Dining
Lemonade	5	\$ 17.99	\$ 89.95	\$ 3,771.30	Refreshments - Bama Dining
Chocolate Cupcakes	6	\$ 23.49	\$ 140.94	\$ 3,912.24	Per Dozen
Vanilla Cupcakes	6	\$ 23.49	\$ 140.94	\$ 4,053.18	Per Dozen
ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION					
Venue	1	\$ 100.00	\$ 100.00	\$ 4,153.18	Ferg 3104
Lunch	40	\$ 13.99	\$ 559.60	\$ 4,712.78	Blackened Chicken Ciabatta Box Lunch
Nametags	40	\$ 0.30	\$ 12.00	\$ 4,724.78	Nametags for attendees, students, & speakers
			\$ -	\$ 4,724.78	
			\$ -	\$ 4,724.78	
TOTAL EXPENSES				\$ 4,724.78	
DIFFERENCE				\$ 275.22	Balanced or Budget Surplus

Sources

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