

Top Questions and Answers (+ Resources) about Fostering

For many of us, foster care is unfamiliar. Jumping into something unknown can be scary. There are lots of myths and misconceptions about foster care, so we want to provide you with resources to make the most informed decision possible as you consider becoming a new foster family. Here are a few things that we think you should consider before starting the foster care licensing process with Thornwell.

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How will foster care impact my children?

“Start children off in the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” Proverbs 22:6

We care about our children more than anything else in the world. What we bring into our home impacts them – good and bad. Foster care holds many unknowns and that can be scary. Bringing children into your home who have experienced trauma will bring challenges. But many foster parents share that overcoming these challenges as a family not only brings them closer together, helps them to communicate, and teaches them new skills, but it is life-changing for their children in largely positive ways. Children learn important lessons about empathy and caring for others. They see first-hand faith and values played out in their home. They develop admirable character traits and dream of changing the world for the better, seeing the world as much bigger than themselves.



Of course, all these positives are part of the big picture. In the day-to-day there may be bickering over sharing toys and the television remote. There may be jealousy for their parents' attention. There may be initial frustration and confusion in transition and changes to routine. These challenges can often be overcome with time, care, and age-appropriate conversations.

At Thornwell, we want to help you make the best decision for your family – the whole family. As you decide what fostering will look like for your family, we encourage you to have conversations with your children all along the way. Listen to their doubts, concerns, questions, and expectations. Validate the challenges of being a foster sibling. And together decide what is needed. Your safety is our priority. If a child in the home is a safety concern, we will work with you to mediate the situation. That may mean finding resources, services, support, or respite. That may mean an emergency removal from the home depending on the situation. Consider your children's needs and listen to their opinions.

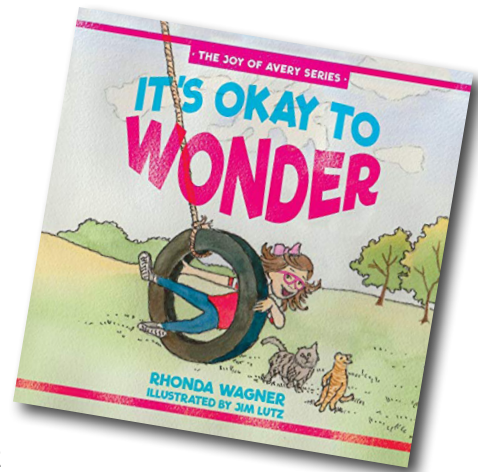
Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents with children in the home.

For adults:

- [Foster the Family: Encouragement, Hope, and Practical Help for the Christian Foster Parent](#), by Jamie Finn
- [Foster Care and What I Feared Most for My Own Kids](#), by Jason Johnson
- [Understanding the Impact of Foster Care and Adoption on Children Already in the Home](#), by Jayne Schooler

For young kids (0-5):

- [The Joy of Avery Series](#), by Rhonda
- [Your Parents' Love](#), by Abbie Mabary
- [Kids Need to Be Safe](#), by Julie Nelson
- [The Stuffed Giraffe: A Foster Care Story](#), by Kimber Daley



For older kids (6+):

- [Pavi Sharma's Guide to Going Home](#), by Bridget
- [The Great Gilly Hopkins](#), by Katherine Paterson
- [Everybody, Always for Kids](#), by Bob Goff and Lindsey Goff Viducich



Can I foster if my spouse is not on board?

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Just as foster care will impact your children, it will impact your marriage. In fact, even if you are not married, foster care will impact all your most important relationships. Foster care is rarely easy. It will bring new stresses and challenges into your life. It will disrupt (at least for a time) your regular schedule and routines. That’s why it is so important for everyone in the home to be on board when you commit to fostering. It takes an “all hands on deck” approach to help a child who has experienced trauma adjust to their new life in your home.



Couples who foster as a team – respecting each other’s boundaries, listening to each other, and communicating their needs - often find that their marriage is strengthened. They grow closer in their shared mission and ministry.

At Thornwell, we encourage couples to commit to foster care as a team. If one person is not completely on board, we recommend not moving forward yet. You might spend time to gather more information, address perceived barriers, assess your current capacity, and seek support and counsel of friends and current foster parents.

You may find that with time, information, and support, you can enter foster parenting wisely together.

If you find that you cannot get on the same page, we encourage you to find other ways to support children and families impacted by foster care with your time, talent, or treasure. You might become a Guardian Ad Litem or wrap-around a current foster family. You might donate to ministries that serve kids and families like Thornwell.

Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parent couples.

- [The Best Thing You Can Do For Your Marriage in Foster Care](#), by Jason Johnson
- [Fostering or Adopting: For the Husband That's Not Sure](#), by Jason Johnson
- [On Husbands + Therapy + Girl Scout Cookies](#), by Real Mom Podcast
- [Resources for Your Marriage in Foster Care](#), by The Forgotten Initiative
- [Instagram Post](#), by @foster.parenting



How can I love a child and then let them go?

“The Lord Himself goes before you; He will be with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid or discouraged.” Deuteronomy 31:8

The fear of getting “too attached” is often one of the greatest barriers to fostering. It is normal to try to avoid pain, loss, and uncertainty. However, saying goodbye is the goal of foster care - foster care is meant to be temporary. It is the role of the foster parent to temporarily stand in the gap for a family as they work towards reunification. It is important for those considering foster care to consider if they can champion reunification efforts – champion the family. There is rarely an understanding of the timeline for a child staying in your home at the time of placement. Permanency efforts may take days, months, or years to complete. This uncertainty is undeniably hard to navigate at times.

You may feel the need to guard your heart to avoid getting “too attached.” Kids deserve your love and attachment! They may not have experienced safe and healthy attachments before. You are building a foundation for all their future relationships.

At Thornwell, we believe in the power of family – and that families belong together. We will offer foster parents gentle care and counsel as they develop healthy relationships with families whenever safe and appropriate.



We'll equip you, walk alongside you, and help you to navigate all the emotions, decisions, and transitions that come with being a foster parent. Goodbye may not be easy, but as an adult you have the support, the coping skills, and the emotional complexity to work through your feelings and fears.

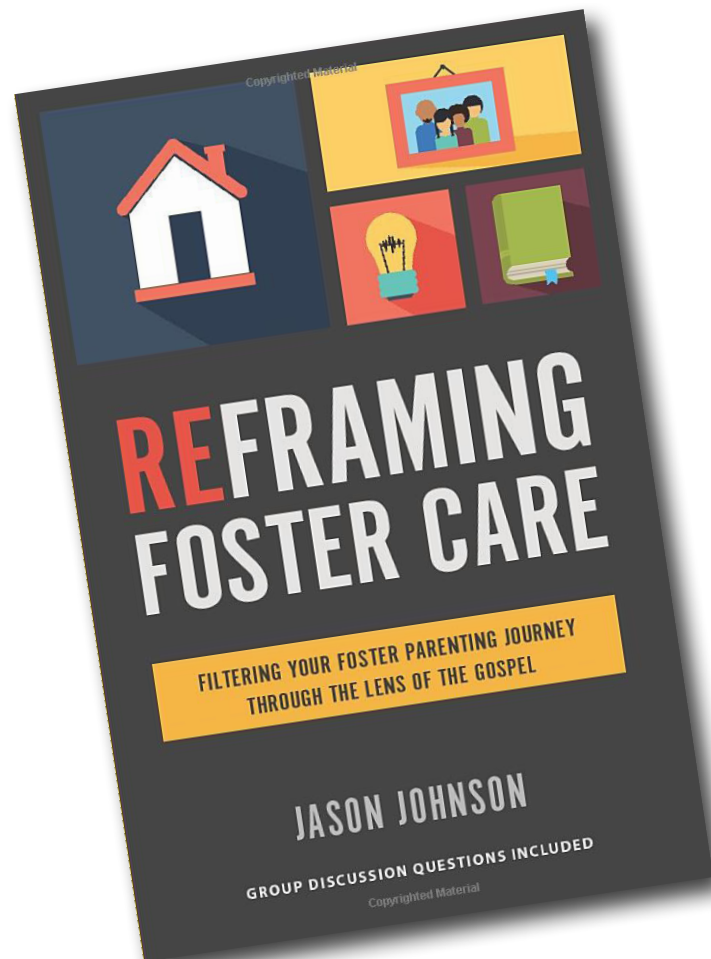
Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents.

For adults:

- [Reframing Foster Care](#), by Jason Johnson
- [On Staying Guarded + Packing up and Saying Goodbye + Talking Adoption with Your Kids](#), by Real Mom Podcast
- [Saying Goodbye: Navigating Reunification as a Foster Parent](#), by The Forgotten Podcast
- [Love and Loss in Foster Care: What I Learned When We Said Goodbye](#), by Fostering Great Ideas

For kids:

- [Love You From Right Here: A Keepsake Book for Children in Foster Care](#), by Jamie Sandefer
- [Invisible String](#), by Patrice Karst



Will I be able to afford fostering?

“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” –

Matthew 25:23

The answer is most likely yes. Most foster parents are normal people with an average income – they often do not have a large disposable income to raise additional children. While there is no minimum income requirement to foster, you need to be able to cover your family’s current living expenses without assistance.

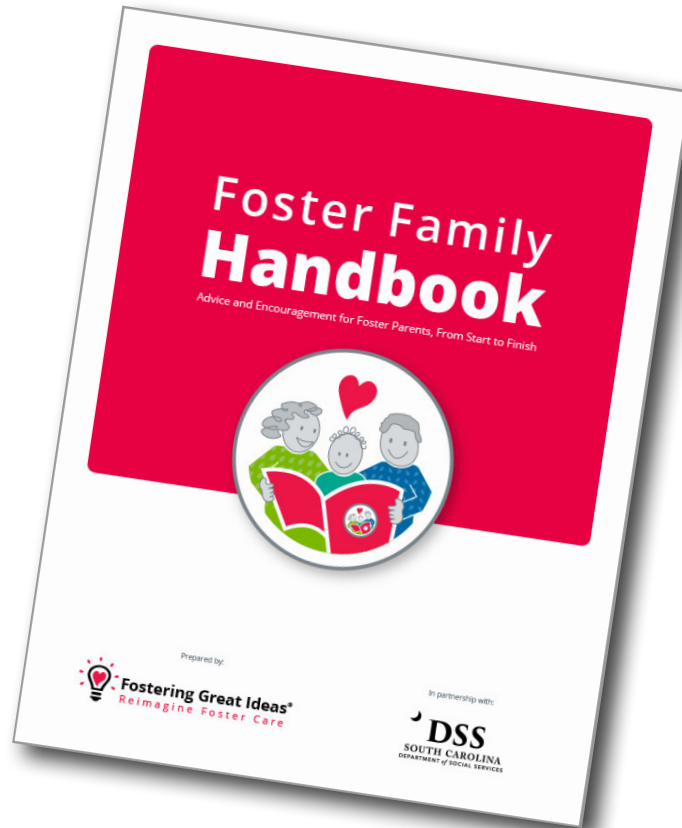
At Thornwell, it is our hope that there is no cost associated with becoming a foster parent. The cost of the licensing process is covered by Thornwell. There may be some families that need to purchase new fire extinguishers or smoke detectors to pass the fire inspection. We do offer some financial support to ensure these requirements can be met if there is an extenuating need.

Foster parents receive financial support for the children they foster. This will come in the form of a monthly “board payment” or stipend. The amount is based on the age of the child and the total number of days in that month that the child was in your home. You’ll also receive a quarterly clothing allowance for each child placed in your home. This money should be used to cover the cost of essentials for the children in your care - food, clothing, school supplies, etc. Some foster parents may choose to spend more than the allotted board payment to provide meaningful experiences for the children they care for such as extracurriculars, vacations with the family, etc.

Children in foster care automatically receive Medicaid and will not need to be enrolled in your family’s medical insurance plan. All doctor, dentist, and mental health appointments should be covered. They are also eligible for WIC (under age 3) and SC Vouchers which pay for some or all the cost of child-care at approved facilities (see abcquality.org)

Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents.

- [Current SC Foster Parent Board Payment Rates](#), SC DSS
- [Foster Family Handbook](#), by SC DSS
- [How much do foster parents get paid?](#) Mousy Leigh Youtube Video (2020)



Can I foster if I work full time?

“May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us – yes, establish the work of our hands.” Psalms 90:17

Foster parents are not required to stay at home with children. Every individual and family gets to decide what is best for their family and their home. There are foster parents that have one adult stay home with children, some foster parents work part-time, some work-from-home, some are dual career couples who work outside the home, and some are single working parents. All are welcome! Many families don't have the option for either parent to stay home or for another family member to stay in the home during the day with children. And that's okay!

Children in foster care can go to school, daycare, or another childcare provider just like any other child in your home.

Whether you are working in the home, out of the home, part-time, or full-time, we encourage you to consider your flexibility and your capacity in adding an additional child to your home. There will be times that you must adjust your work schedule to meet the needs of the child in your home. You will have support from Thornwell, DSS, and your family, friends, and other foster parents. Cultivate that community of support. Make a solid plan and backup plan for childcare before any children arrive in your home.



Children in foster care are automatically eligible for SC vouchers which cover some or all the cost of childcare or afterschool care at approved facilities. These vouchers are available to foster parents regardless of if they work, go to school, or stay home full time. It is important to note that immediate openings at approved daycares are often hard to find. Some foster parents confirm that their childcare facility of choice has an opening prior to accepting a placement. Some foster parents foster school age children so that there is guaranteed care during most daytime work hours.

There are many types of foster care. If you aren't sure if your work schedule will allow you the flexibility to manage the additional care and appointments of children in foster care long-term, you might consider starting with respite care or short-term emergency foster care. Short-term foster care means that you are welcoming a child or youth for a pre-determined amount of time. Respite care means that you are caring for the child placed in another licensed foster home. This may be for a night, weekend, or longer – typically no longer than two weeks depending on the reason that respite care is needed. Emergency foster care is typically for a child/youth that comes into foster care and no immediate long-term placement can be confirmed. You agree to care for the child or youth for an agreed upon amount of time, typically one night. DSS would be responsible for picking up the child or youth at the agreed upon time (typically before you must leave for work) unless you make arrangements to transport to school or the DSS office.

Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents.

- [SC Voucher program](#)
- [The Truth About Being a Full-Time Working Foster Parent and Overcoming the Challenges](#), by Fostering Great Ideas
- [Being a Working Foster Parent...](#), by Laura – Foster Parent Partner Youtube Video
- Follow [@FosterTheTeens](#) on Instagram for more tips

Can I foster if I'm single?

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace.” – 1 Peter 4:10



Absolutely, YES! At Thornwell, we welcome single individuals to foster with us. We have foster families in all shapes and sizes.

All types of parents – married parents, co-parents, stepparents, single parents, foster parents - experience the joys and challenges of caring for kids. Your situation may look different from your friends who are parenting, but that isn't a bad thing. In fact, it's a great thing. We need different parent and home types to support the diverse and unique needs of children entering foster care. You can offer a child something special – you! Just as you are. Single foster parents are rockstars – especially when they are well supported!

All foster parents need a community of support. This is just as true, if not truer, for single foster parents. You'll need friends and family and neighbors to wrap around you in a variety of ways as you welcome children into your home. Every foster parent may need different support at different times. Generally, you'll want emotional, mental, and spiritual support from people who love you so that you aren't carrying all the burdens of foster parenting alone. You'll want physical and tangible support from people in your community – this may be help with transportation, childcare or babysitting, gathering supplies for a new placement, meals or groceries on hectic days, help with errands, etc. We cannot thrive in isolation! Don't be afraid to ask for help.

At Thornwell, we want to be a part of your community of support. We will be there for you every step of the way! And you'll be connected to a larger community of foster parents as well.

Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents.

- [Single + Foster Parenting: You are Needed](#), by The Forgotten Podcast
- [Single Foster Parenting: Real Strategies from Real Moms](#), by The Forgotten Podcast
- [Single Foster Mom and Lawyer Extraordinaire](#), by The Archibald Project Podcast
- [Your Guide to Single Foster Parenting](#), by The Forgotten Initiative

How do I know if my home/apartment will be approved for fostering? What do I need?

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.” Matthew 7:24-25

You do not have to own a home to be able to foster. There are foster parents that foster successfully in all types of homes – owned homes, rented homes, town homes, condos, and apartments. No matter where you live, you will need to meet the requirements that Thornwell sets for all licensed foster homes in addition to the requirements set by South Carolina Department of Social Services.

Each foster home must have space for an additional child. Everyone living in the home must have a bed in a designated bedroom with a door that closes. Children may not share a bedroom with an adult (over 18). Children may share a bedroom with other children – either children in foster care regardless of relation or the children permanently in your home. There are requirements regarding which children can share a bedroom based on age and gender.

At Thornwell, we will support you as you prepare your home for foster care licensing. We will walk with you through every step of the process, helping you to understand what is required. Basic home requirements include fire, health, and safety regulations. You may need to purchase a new fire extinguisher or smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. If you do not own your home and you need to make updates to meet foster home licensing requirements, you’ll need to talk to the landlord or homeowner to see if those changes are permissible. You will likely have to cover the cost of these changes out-of-pocket. However, Thornwell never wants cost to be the only factor that stops you from being able to pursue licensure. We do have home readiness assistance available on an as-needed basis.



Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents.

- [Code Enforcement for SC Foster Homes](#), by State Fire Marshal
- [10 Items Every Foster Home Needs Before the First Placement](#), by Fostering Great Ideas
- [8 Must Haves Before Your First Foster Placement](#), by Iris Kelly



Follow [@foster.parenting](#) on Instagram for more tips

Can I give an age-range or gender preference for the children that come into my home?

“May He equip you with all you need for doing His will. May He produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever! Amen.” – Hebrews 13:21

Yes! You are in control of who you bring into your home. There are many things to consider when deciding what ages, genders, and behaviors your family has the capacity to care for well. Be discerning and realistic, but keep an open mind! Remember that foster care is not about finding a child for your family but finding a family for a child. Children come into foster care at every age (0-18) and every child deserves a loving caring home.

The greatest need for more foster parents in South Carolina is for families who will enthusiastically welcome teens, sibling groups, and youth who identify as LGBTQ+. If you can consider fostering these children and youth, you are greatly needed! While there are young children who enter foster care, there are already many foster families who want to foster young children. This means that there are waiting families, not waiting young children. That’s a great thing!



At Thornwell, we are on a mission to find a home for every child and youth in foster care in South Carolina. We will support you as you find the need that you can meet. Not everyone has room for multiple children. That’s okay. There are ways to foster sibling connections even if the children aren’t all under your roof. Not every child or youth will be a good fit for your home, and that’s okay. You always have the right to say “no” to a placement when called. You’ll also have the opportunity to say “yes” even if it is outside your typical age range, gender, number of children, etc. We will help you say “yes” whenever it is a good fit with encouragement, support, resources and community.

Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents.

- [Pros and Cons of Fostering Teens](#), by TeenWire
- [Foster Teens](#), by Foster Futures
- [Foster Dad of Teens](#), by Sam Mercer
- [Teens Need Families](#), by AdoptUSKids
- [Teens and Siblings Need Foster Parents](#), by Forever Family
- [Fostering Teens](#), by Laura Foster
- [Fostering Sibling Sets](#), by Laura Foster
- [How one couple helps foster siblings stay together](#), Good Morning America

Follow [@fostertheteens](#) on Instagram for more tips

Can I say “no” to a placement? What if a child is placed in my home and it isn’t working out?

Foster parents are always in control of who is in their home. You can say “no” to any placement call for any reason without consequence. We want you to feel comfortable to make the decisions that are best for your family because ultimately those decisions protect the health and safety of children as well. You do not have to say “yes” every time that your Family Specialist calls you with a child that needs a foster home. We want you to thoughtfully consider. For example, if everyone in the house has strep throat then it may not be good timing. If your daycare doesn’t have any openings and you require immediate access to childcare, it may not be a good fit.

Here are some general questions we hope you’ll consider when answering a placement call:

- Do we have the mental, emotional, and time capacity to care for an additional child in this season?
- Do we have the ability and willingness to support the anticipated needs of this particular child?
- Do we have the support required to welcome this child – daycare, afterschool care, bedspace, etc.?

While we certainly encourage you to be discerning in the children you welcome, we hope that you will keep an open mind when considering your ability to care for children and youth of all ages in need of a safe, stable, loving temporary home.

All children deserve to be safe and loved. There may be times when a child or youth is placed in your home and you discover that their needs are more significant than you anticipated. We encourage you to seek the support, resources, and services available to you as a foster parent. Your Family Specialist and the Foster Care team along with the DSS case manager will support you as you serve the child. However, there may be times where the child’s needs are truly more (or different) than your family is realistically able to meet at this time. You are in control of who is in your home.

You can request a 10-day removal notice for the child to be placed in another foster home. You may also be able to submit an emergency removal notice if there is an immediate safety risk. The child may be better served in a different foster home or they may need a higher level of therapeutic care. We want the child to get the care they need and deserve.

Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents.

- [Can I say “no” to a foster care placement](#), by Fostering Great Ideas
- [\(Example\) Saying No to a Placement Call](#), by @foster.parenting on Instagram
- [I Say No to Placements All the Time](#), by Foster the Family
- [Disrupting a Placement](#), by Suzanne Hines
- [What if a child is placed in my home and it isn’t working out?](#) by Fostering Great Ideas

Do I have to interact with the child's parents? Will I be safe?

Foster parents are always in control of when, how, and what personal information (if any) is shared with a child's parents or family members. You can choose to have as little or as much interaction with the child's parents and/or family members as you feel comfortable with as long as the child and family team advises that it is safe and appropriate. Our goal is that you are always safe, comfortable, and feel protected.

At Thornwell, we believe that families belong together and so our foster care focus remains on reunification. We encourage families to build thoughtful relationships with a child's family. We offer gentle care and counsel to all our foster parents as they champion family reunification through healthy relationships whenever safe and appropriate. We'll equip you, walk alongside you, and help you to navigate all the emotions, decisions, and transitions that come with being a foster parent.

Supportive relationships between a foster parent and a child's parent can be beneficial to all involved – most importantly to the child. Children love their parents and often want more than anything to be with them – regardless of the abuse, neglect, or abandonment they experienced. When children enter foster care, they are separated from everything they've ever known. Foster parents provide a safe, stable temporary home for them to heal and thrive. They can also help build, mend, or strengthen important relationships in healthy, safe, and meaningful ways with parents or other family. Reunification may take days, months, or even years to occur. That is precious time lost if a child cannot nurture those connections.

Interaction may start as an introduction and telling parents their children are safe at a family visit or the first court date. Communication may first look like updates through a shared journal or notes sent to family visits. Consider including school work, art projects, and photos of the child. It may grow to include emails, phone calls or texts, or video calls. Eventually with approval from the case manager, foster parents may consider inviting parents to school, extracurricular, or important events like birthday parties. This is a progression of interaction that feels comfortable and safe for you as the foster parent.

Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents.

- [Co-Parenting or Shared Parenting](#), by North American Council on Adoptable Children
- [What is Shared Parenting for Children in Foster Care?](#) by Family and Children's Resource Program
- [What Shared Parenting Actually Looks Like and How to Hold on To Hope](#), by Fostering Great Ideas
- [Sharing Memories with Parents Makes Childhood Milestones That Much Sweeter](#), by Fostering Great Ideas
- [Stepping Forward with Compassion, Rather than Standing Back in Judgement](#), by Fostering Great Ideas
- [A Letter to Foster Parents From a Mom After Reunification](#), by Fostering Great Ideas

