

September 6, 2024

Jennifer Townsend, Vice President of Children & Youth Programs
FosterAdopt Connect (FAC)
Verbal Testimony
SOUL Family Legal Permanency Option Update

Chairperson Concannon, Vice Chair Gossage, Ranking Minority Member Ousley, and Members of the Committee, my name is Jennifer Townsend. I am the Vice President of Children & Youth Programs with FosterAdopt Connect (FAC). My primary role as a member of the Kansas SOUL Family Demonstration Site Team has been to assist and support our Lived Expert partners. I am also the Kansas Lead of the Authentic Youth & Family Engagement Practice Subgroup.

Recommendation Selection Process

March 2024	Authentic Youth and Family Engagement Subgroup launched
April 2024	The subgroup established its purpose: to provide recommendations for strengthening youth and family engagement practices, inform training needs, and identify available resources.
May 2024	The subgroup's leadership facilitated a World Café Activity during an in-person Kansas SOUL Family Demonstration Site Team Meeting and asked the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What Training or models that center authentic youth engagement could be used in implementing SOUL Family in Kansas?• What examples of current youth engagement in Kansas could be leveraged in permanency planning?• If you have used an authentic youth engagement framework, what was the impact?
June 2024	The subgroup explored responses from the World Café Activity, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adolescent Brain Development and Coaching• Trust-Based Relational Intervention• Developmental Assets Framework• Motivational Interviewing• You Thrive Members explored the following aspects of each: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providers• Summary of Content• Length or Duration• Delivery Format• Interaction

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost • Train the Trainer Component • Inclusion of Coaching • Integration of DEI Principals • Ethical Considerations
July 2024	The subgroup synthesized the findings and solidified their recommendation that Kansas move forward with the Adolescent Brain Development Curriculum and coaching framework proved by SOUL Family National Support, Cetera.
August 2024	Representatives from the subgroup, Cetera, the Annie E. Casey Foundation presented information on the Adolescent Brain Development Curriculum and coaching to DCF and Kansas Case Management Providers

Adolescent Brain Development

The adolescent brain undergoes significant changes that influence how they experience the world. Research has shown that the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain responsible for executive functions such as impulse control, emotional regulation, introspection, planning, attention, and critical thinking, develops into our mid-20s.

During adolescence, the brain is highly malleable, which means that experiences and interventions can have profound effects on development. Positive experiences, such as supportive environments, strong relationships, and achievement, enhance cognitive and emotional functioning while negative experiences can hinder them.

Additionally, it is important to understand the adolescent’s need for effective regulation, positive peer relationships, and reward-based learning throughout this period of brain development.

Benefits of ABD and Coaching

- Applicable to all permanency plans
- Focused on older youth, including authentic partnerships with young people.
- Centers cultural connections, values, and young people thriving in their communities.
- Locally sustainable thanks to their train-the-trainer model.
- Can be provided in-person, virtually, or hybrid.
- Coaching is available to assist participants in how they utilize brain science in their relationships with the young people they serve.
- Adolescent Brain Development and coaching has demonstrated a positive track record in other child welfare jurisdictions.

Adolescence is a critical period for brain development, offering a unique opportunity for child welfare professionals to support growth and healing via authentic engagement.

It has been an honor to be a small part of Kansas' historical passage of HOUSE BILL 2536 and a privilege to serve our amazing Lived Experts. I am excited to support the successful and sustainable implementation of the SOUL Family Legal Permanency Option statewide.

Jennifer Townsend