



Joint Committee on Child Welfare System Oversight
September 11, 2024

Chair Concannon, Vice Chair Gossage, Ranking Minority Member Ousley and members of the Committee:

My name is Linda Bass, and I am the President of the nonprofit KVC Kansas. Our case managers, therapists, and other helping professionals appreciate the opportunity to serve as the state’s foster care case management provider in two of the eight catchment areas.

About KVC Kansas

KVC Kansas is a nonprofit organization founded over 50 years ago. KVC has been a continuous foster care case management provider for the past 27 years. Today, we are a team of 450 child welfare and mental health professionals committed to strengthening families, preventing child abuse and neglect, and helping both children and adults achieve mental wellness. We provide prevention services, foster care case management, outpatient mental health and substance abuse recovery services, residential treatment, and child placing agency services. We are the case management grantee organization for foster care in catchment areas 3 and 6; serving Kansas City, Lawrence, Topeka, Hiawatha, and surrounding counties.

Kansas Child Welfare System Status Update

The number of children experiencing foster care in Kansas continues to trend downward, averaging just under 5,700 children in foster care across our state – the lowest number since 2013. Area 3 has been averaging 870 and area 6 has been averaging 566 children in out of home care this fiscal year. Increased prevention programming circumvents the need for foster care and helps keep families safely together. This has led to more children achieving permanency than entering out-of-home care. Continuing to increase our focus on early intervention and support will not only improve children's lives but also strengthen Kansas communities and families for generations to come. This is what’s best for Kansas families and benefits our workforce by reducing unnecessary strain on the system.

Referral and Permanencies (past 12 months)

# of Referrals		621 children
Permanencies:	Total	679 children
	Adoption	201 children
	Aged Out	104 youth



Reintegration	351 children
Custodianship	11 children
Other	12 children

Youth legally free for adoption: 286. Youth are featured on <http://adoption.kvc.org> and www.adoptkskids.org.

Data on Youth in Offices Overnight

Since the last JCCWSO meeting, KVC Kansas has had two occurrences of youth overnight in an office. Our KVC team continues to work diligently to ensure that every youth has a safe, stable placement. All youth who spent the night in the office have significant behavioral health needs.

Month	Number of youths, number of nights	Reason for overnight office stay
June 2024	0	N/A
July 2024	1 youth, 1 night	Youth was located after running away but no placements accepted youth in the short amount of time, leading to an overnight stay.
August 2024	0	N/A
September 2024 (through September 8 th)	1 youth, 1 night	Youth emergency disrupted from foster home, temporary placement was located, youth refused to leave office.

Data on Caseload Sizes

KVC Kansas is operating within the DCF caseload guidelines 1:13 for Reintegration, 1:20 for Adoption, and 1:23 for Aftercare. Within the new foster care contract that began July 1st, KVC has also improved the supervisor to staff ratio to 1:6 (previously averaging 1:8).

Kansas City (catchment area 6)

Reunification cases (within DCF and KVC set caseload limits)

Individual CM – 13.4

Team – 24

Adoption cases (within DCF and KVC set caseload limits)

Individual CM – 21



Aftercare cases (within DCF and KVC set caseload limits)

Individual CM – 21.9

East (catchment area 3)

Reunification cases (within DCF and KVC set caseload limits)

Individual CM – 15.7

Team – 36.4

Adoption cases (within DCF and KVC set caseload limits)

Individual CM – 20

Team – 46

Aftercare cases (within DCF and KVC set caseload limits)

Individual CM – 25.7

Data on Missing and Runaway Youth

- KVC Kansas employs two full-time Missing Youth Specialists (MYS) who work to engage all youth who are at risk for running behavior. MYS have small caseloads so they can spend time with youth building relationships and preventing future runs.
- On average, of the 1,426 youth in KVC programming, there are 12-16 youth who are missing or have temporarily run away daily (approx. 1% which is consistent with the national average)

Workforce Recruitment, Retention, and Safety

KVC Kansas ended FY24 with 75% employee retention (compared to typical child welfare retention rates are only 50-60%). Staff retention for July 2024 was 97.6% and August 2024 was 96.4%. Staff retention preserves critical knowledge and expertise in the workforce while also ensuring children and families receive consistent, high-quality care and do not experience a change in workers while receiving services. KVC continues to have a partnership with Gallup focused on employee engagement. During our most recent Gallup survey KVC increased the percentage of engaged staff.



Settlement Performance

The 2024 settlement audit case file reads with DCF and the Settlement Administrator (The Neutral) are currently in progress and a final report is due out soon.

Beginning July 1, 2024, KVC's Outpatient Behavioral Health Services Department started completing assessments by completing all initial and ongoing mental health assessments. This change has improved timeliness and consistency in completing all assessments and improved the process of mental health referrals. The chart below demonstrates our progress towards this goal based on our internal measures and collaboration with DCF.

KVC Kansas Settlement Data: Initial Mental Health and Trauma Screens Completed Within 30 Days Upon Each Entry into the Foster Care System (May 2024 - August 2024)		
May 2024		
	Area 3	Area 6
Percent of youth who received an initial mental health and trauma screen within 30 days	100%	100%
Number of youth who received an initial mental health and trauma screen within 30 days	22 youth	33 youth
June 2024		
Percent of youth who received an initial mental health and trauma screen within 30 days	100%	100%
Number of youth who received an initial mental health and trauma screen within 30 days	30 youth	19 youth
July 2024		
Percent of youth who received an initial mental health and trauma screen within 30 days	DCF reviewing data	DCF reviewing data
Number of youth who received an initial mental health and trauma screen within 30 days	29 youth	19 youth
August 2024		
Percent of youth who received an initial mental health and trauma screen within 30 days	DCF reviewing data	DCF reviewing data



Number of youth who received an initial mental health and trauma screen within 30 days	22 youth	7 youth
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Innovative Programming

2Generation Program: Community-Based Services for Families

KVC is proud to have been selected as a grantee to implement the 2Generation Program, providing prevention-based services and support to improve the health, social, and economic outcomes for children and families in 27 eastern Kansas counties. **Since the program began July 1, 2024, 73 families have already enrolled in the program.**

Our 2Gen Program is specifically designed to address common barriers to accessing support services, such as transportation, internet access, work schedules and childcare challenges. This program offers one-on-one, in-home, virtual, and group interventions tailored for at-risk families. Going beyond simply education, our team equips families with essential resources and referrals to address the underlying risk factors contributing to poverty.

Through KVC's team of family navigators, families benefit from:

- Individualized support services lasting 3-6 months.
- Personalized service plans covering financial literacy, healthy relationships, protective factors, and parenting skills.
- Healthcare navigation.
- Crisis stabilization services as needed.

The 2Gen Approach aims to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty by supporting both children and their parents or caregivers as a cohesive family unit. In our program, we'll offer one-on-one, in-home, virtual, and group interventions, providing families with essential resources and referrals to address underlying risk factors contributing to poverty.

Find more information about KVC Kansas's 2Generation Program at kvckansas.org/2Gen.

Rise Up: Youth Behavioral Health Support

KVC Kansas' Rise Up program offers intensive in-home and community-based support for youth with significant behavioral health needs. With this program, the goal is to stabilize families and prevent the need for foster care. The program provides regular home visits, crisis management, and care coordination with local resources such as therapy and school support.



Rise Up is designed for youth involved with the juvenile court system and those with significant behavioral challenges, including those in Families in Need of Assessment (FINA) cases, to help them stay safely at home. The program strengthens family bonds, improves youth outcomes, and reduces interactions with the justice system.

We are now accepting Shawnee County based referrals at kvckansas.org/RiseUp.

SOUL Family Legal Permanency Option

KVC is excited to help the Kansas child welfare system move forward with the implementation of SOUL Family as a legal permanency option. Kansas is the first state in the nation to provide this permanency option to youth in foster care. HB2536 allows for the establishment of SOUL Family Legal Permanency as a new permanency option for youth in foster care who are 16 years and older. This adds a fifth legal option to Kansas's existing continuum of permanency options of reintegration, legal guardianship, adoption and APPLA (another planned permanent living arrangement). New statutes will be set out in the Kansas Child in Need of Care ("CINC") Code (K.S.A. 38-2201 et seq).

This new permanency option officially went into effect through legislation and applicable DCF policy changes on July 1, 2024. KVC Kansas is working diligently to identify youth who may be a good fit for achieving permanency through SOUL. Our staff are also participating in DCF-led training to educate themselves on the requirements and benefits of SOUL Family Legal Permanency Option. Click [HERE](#) to read more about SOUL Family Legal Permanency Option in a KVC Kansas blog post.

KVC Kansas permanency staff are currently reviewing all youth in care who meet the age requirements and working to educate the youth and their support systems about this permanency option.



Why Are Kansas Children Sleeping in Offices?

In recent years, some Kansas children in foster care have ended up sleeping in child welfare offices overnight because there were no relatives, foster homes or care centers available. However, this is not just a challenge in Kansas—states like Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Kentucky, Texas, New Mexico, Illinois, Colorado, and more are facing similar challenges. *So, what's behind this national crisis?* **There are multiple factors, but it boils down to a lack of community-based services and mental health treatment.**



Kansas has successfully reduced the number of children in foster care by 25 percent, from a high of 7,687 children in 2018 to approximately 5,700 children today. However, due to inadequate foster care prevention spending on family strengthening programs and mental health services, Kansas still has twice the national rate of children in foster care.

According to the latest [Child Welfare Financing Survey](#) from Child Trends, Kansas allocates just 2% of its state and local child welfare funds to prevention, whereas the average U.S. state spends 16% of its child welfare funds on prevention. Federal reimbursement changes under the Family First Act have further amplified the problem, as youth with higher needs can't easily access the right placement settings.

Foster care should only be used as a last resort when children experience abuse or neglect, but families in crisis often turn to it when they can't access essential mental health services. Kansas children and families urgently need more community-based programs and increased access to mental health treatment. By further investing in these vital services, our state can safely reduce the number of children in foster care by half, bringing Kansas in line with the national average.

We applaud this committee and other state legislators for their ongoing efforts to increase access to prevention services and mental health treatment. However, to stop children from spending nights in offices and ensure they can access the support and resources they need, Kansas must greatly increase its investment in these vital services. By learning from other states and continuing to invest in foster care prevention, we can ensure that every child has a stable, loving home.

To understand the full scope of these challenges and potential solutions, I encourage you to [watch this video](#) and [read the full article](#), which provides a deeper look into why youth in foster care stay overnight in offices and what our state can do to better serve children and families.



KVC Kansas is honored to continue providing foster care case management services in Areas 3 and 6 along with a broad continuum of prevention and community-based services to reduce the need for foster care.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today, and I welcome any questions.