



Joint Committee on Child Welfare System Oversight March 31, 2025

Chair Gossage, Vice Chair Howerton, and Committee members:

I am Tabitha Gibson, Sr. Vice President of Permanency for TFI Family Services. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony today.

Who We Are

TFI is a private, not-for-profit organization founded nearly 60 years ago in Lyon County. We provide a wide range of child welfare and behavioral health services throughout the state. Today, we are a team of over 500 Kansas child welfare and family well-being professionals whose mission is to be Devoted to the Strength of Family. Our current services include early intervention to maintain and strengthen families, foster care in both family and residential settings, adoption support, independent living services, aftercare, and case management services for youth and families in the child welfare system.

Workforce Highlight

Program	Number of Employees
Case Management	242
Residential	76
Support	153
Prevention	43
Foster Care	48
Total	510

Increasing our workforce and improving engagement and retention in the field of child welfare has not been an easy task. We continue to make active efforts to address the shortage of qualified professionals and, while caseload sizes are declining and turnover rates have improved compared to last fiscal year, the shortage of applicants with qualifying degrees is concerning. Case Manager and Foster Home Worker positions require licensure with the Kansas Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board. Unfortunately, the majority of applicants for these positions in recent years do not hold the required licensable degree.

We believe that a coordinated statewide effort to message the need for licensed professionals is necessary. TFI is excited to participate with DCF and other providers in a child welfare workforce subcommittee to tackle this challenge.

Ongoing focus on prevention efforts is another avenue for reducing the workforce challenges facing foster care and case management service providers. DCF has done tremendous work in the prevention arena in recent years and case management providers have continued to focus on safe and timely permanency for children who do have to enter foster care, reducing the demand on the child welfare workforce through reducing the need for foster care by over 1,700 children since 2019. However, the out-of-home population per capita in Kansas continues to be higher than the national average (12 children per 1,000 vs. 5 children per 1,000 nationally according to Kansas Health Institute, April 2024, *Spotlight on Foster Care: Kansas Data Walk*), resulting in an ongoing demand for child welfare workers that is greater than the supply.

TFI continues to work toward achieving caseload ratios. The average case manager caseload carrying a mixed caseload of adoption and reunification cases is currently 23. The average aftercare caseload is currently 22 Children/case manager.

Prevention Services

Family First: The primary purpose of this program is to prevent at-risk children from entering foster care by using the evidenced-based program called Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT). These families have been referred because of the need to assist parents in developing the best strategies for effectively communicating with, nurturing, and supporting their children.

Family Preservation: The primary purpose of this program is to provide a variety of supportive interventions within the family home to strengthen the family for addressing challenges that otherwise lead to the consideration that the child is not safe at home and needs to be removed from the family. Such services may include behavioral health treatment, tutoring, job-finding and maintenance, the purchase of hard goods, and crisis intervention.

TFI is the Family Preservation service provider for both the Southwest and Northwest Regions in Kansas. The program model no longer has two tier levels for referrals. Beginning July 1, 2024, the referral for services is made to the service provider in the region. The Southwest Region has served 176 families since July 1, 2024 and the Northwest Region has served 130 families in the same time period.

Prevention Families Served since July 1, 2024:

Program	FY 25 (to date)
PCIT	24
Family Preservation Northwest Region	130
Family Preservation Southwest Region	176
Total	330

Out-of-Home Services

Child Placing Agency (CPA):

We are licensed by DCF to sponsor foster homes throughout the state and have been heavily focused on increasing the capacity of available family-like settings. Currently, there are approximately 1.2 children per licensed foster home and the agency's goal is to increase that to better-utilize licensed beds. Another area of focus for the CPA is improving placement stability through foster home recruitment, including exploring creative strategies for the

provision of families to meet the need of some of the state's highest-acuity youth.

Status of Licensed Homes as of March 21, 2025:

Number of licensed foster homes	411
Number of children in TFI sponsored foster homes	520
% of placements in TFI foster homes also in TFI CMP contracts	66.92%
% of placements in TFI foster homes from other Case Management Providers	33.08%

Case Management Provider (CMP) Services:

TFI serves as the Case Management Provider for Areas 4 (Southeast Kansas) and 8 (South Central Kansas).

As of March 25, 2025, we are serving 1,072 children in out-of-home placement and 224 children in aftercare services. So far this fiscal year, more than 55% of the 405 TFI youth who have exited our program returned to live with their family of origin, while 18% have achieved permanency through a finalized adoption. A data point we are monitoring is the increase so far this fiscal year in youth aging out of foster care rather than achieving permanency with a family. It is our hope that SOUL Family Legal Permanency will create paths to permanency that will help reduce that number and are pleased to share that we have achieved four SOUL finalizations since implementation.

Since the start of the current fiscal year on July 1, 2024, 398 children served by TFI have exited care for the following reasons:

Permanency Type	Number of Youth
Reunification	226
Adoption	73
Guardianship/Permanent Custodianship	20
APPLA (independent living)	79
SOUL	
Total	398

Outcome highlights:

- **Relative/Kinship Placements.** Currently, 47.3% of the youth in TFI's case management program are placed with relative or non-related kinship families, an outcome area TFI supports as best practice for children and families. TFI also believes strongly that placing with someone known to the child should happen at the time of referral whenever that is safely possible. So far this fiscal year, more than

56% of new referrals were placed with a relative/non-relative kinship home the day they entered care.

- **Placement Stability.** Areas 4 and 8 are performing well with regard to placement stability outcomes. This is the result of a combination of factors including partnerships with our own CPA in developing innovative strategies such as a professional foster home program, increased supports from foster home workers, ongoing work with case management staff regarding trauma-informed de-escalation strategies, and a reduction in the out-of-home population.
- **Timely completion of initial child needs assessments:** Due to workforce challenges in hiring Case Managers with qualifying degrees mentioned earlier in TFI's testimony, timely completion of initial assessments had been an area of need for the agency. Transferring that task to our Clinical Department in FY2024 has resulted in both Areas consistently meeting the 90% compliance benchmarks for these assessments.

Outcome areas our case management program is currently focused on improving include:

- Improving the rates of siblings placed together (from 76% to 80%)
- Improving family-like setting to new contract goals (from 90.9% to 92%)
- Maintaining placement stability rates in both areas
- Continuing to improve documentation of the mental health services accessed/provided once a need is identified

Children Overnight in Agency Offices

TFI has improved placement stability while at the same time preventing youth sleeping in offices. Since the last committee meeting in November, 2024, TFI has had no failures to place and has one failure to place so far this fiscal year. TFI is carefully monitoring youth being placed in overnight or short-term placements, as well. This information is reported to DCF weekly.

Absent Youth

TFI's Special Response Team continues to work diligently whenever a youth is absent from placement to make contact and return youth to a safe environment. As of the writing of this testimony, TFI has 2 youth who are absent from placement.

SOUL Family

TFI is very excited to have had a positive response to the implementation of SOUL Family as a permanency option, with four youth having achieved permanency through a SOUL finalization. TFI's goal is to have at least 5 youth this fiscal year achieve permanency through SOUL.

I am pleased to stand for questions and discussion at the appropriate time.

Tabitha Gibson, LMSW
tgibson@tfifamily.org
(620) 687-0708