



Kansas Children's Service League

**Agency Overview to the Special Committee on Foster Care Oversight
Chair Susan Concannon
October 21, 2020**

Thank you for providing me this opportunity to share written information about the Kansas Children's Service League (KCSL), a private, non-profit, 501(c)3 operating in Kansas since 1893. KCSL is the Kansas Chapter for Prevent Child Abuse America and has been since 1993, our mission is ***"To Protect and Promote the Well-Being of Children"*** through a wide array of family services and supports. I am providing this written testimony to further emphasize the importance of preventing child abuse from occurring-and the impact those efforts could have on diverting children from the foster care system.

Recent research in the field of child abuse and neglect prevention focuses on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). **ACEs include abuse and neglect as well as other household dysfunctions or circumstances that affect children adversely, including substance abuse, mental illness of a parent, domestic violence, and criminal behavior-all of which place a child at higher risk of entering the foster care system.** The childhood trauma stemming from adversity has a profound impact on social connections, school readiness, and the increased likelihood of developing negative coping mechanisms which have an impact on our larger society in terms of health-related costs, worker productivity costs, and criminal justice costs as these children become adults. This is compounded when a child has adverse experiences in 4 or more of the 10 primary categories.

Although Adverse Childhood Experiences are damaging, **science also shows providing stable, responsive, nurturing relationships in the earliest years of life can prevent or even reverse the damaging effects of early life stress, with lifelong benefits for learning, behavior, and health.** Additionally, we also know children under the age of three are at the highest risk of death due to abuse or neglect than any other age group of children. In my time serving on the Child Welfare Systems Task Force we heard testimony which suggested children under the age of three where a report is made regarding possible child abuse or neglect should be referred to support services-even if there is no evidence to substantiate the allegation. **These children are at high risk because they do not have the ability to tell anyone what may be happening in their home environment.**

At the previous meeting of the Special Committee on Foster Care Oversight, you heard home visitation is a key strategy for supporting families and preventing the need for foster care. Most evidence-based home visitation programs are targeted at parents with children age 0-3. This would be a very targeted population to consider for a differential response. In SFY 2020 over 1000 children in foster care where under the age of 3. Differential response in child welfare

refers to the state child welfare system working collaboratively with community agencies to address cases where there are concerns about the child's welfare, but where abuse or neglect has not been confirmed. Differential response is often most effective for families where neglect is the primary concern which may be compounded by poverty. It should also be noted that in SFY 2020 for children under the age of three, the three of the four primary reasons for removal from the parental home were for some form of neglect and included lack of supervision, physical neglect, and a caretaker's inability to cope. Physical abuse was the other highest removal category and KCSL would not recommend in these cases differential response is appropriate.

Kansas Children's Service League currently provides a home visitation model which is recognized by national experts to prevent child abuse and neglect. This national model is Healthy Families America. Healthy Families America is an evidence based intensive home visitation program. The program promotes positive parent-child interactions and healthy attachment, and assistance to help the family gain economic self-sufficiency. Families are visited at least weekly during their first 6 months in the program; at that time depending on how they are doing they may move to visits occurring twice a month. Families have the opportunity to return to weekly visits if they experience a crisis and need the additional support for a period of time. Visits occur in the home; and have two purposes. The first is to help the parents better understand child development and to ensure they are doing things with their infant to further his/her development both physically and intellectually, things like tummy time and the importance of reading. The second is to help the parents become more self-sufficient by helping them obtain their goals. These may be broad in range from obtaining their high school diploma or GED; to enrolling in college or technical courses; to learning how to budget; learning how to fill out an application for employment and how to interview. KCSL received funding through the Families First Prevention Services grants for expansion of this program in SG County and SE KS. Over 50% of the parents referred to this program are struggling with one or more of the following risk factors: substance use; mental illness; unemployment; domestic violence; unresolved trauma from child abuse. **Despite these parental risk factors, in 2019 94% of the 774 families served in this program through KCSL were not placed into foster care.**

In conclusion, prevention efforts are most cost effective and efficient for children who are able to safely remain at home. Continued investment in the Families First Prevention as well as other funding sources such as TANF; to support home visitation models for parent skill building are critical to the success of at-risk families in Kansas

Thank you for inviting me to provide you with information regarding the prevention of child abuse and neglect. I would be happy to meet with you individually for further discussion about home visitation and the successes KCSL has seen for those in the program, if you are interested.

-Gail Cozadd, CEO
(785) 215-6401

*Statistical data regarding out of home placement obtained from The Department for Children and Families Website-Public Reports -Children in Out of Home Placements.

3 Types of ACEs

ABUSE



Physical



Emotional



Sexual

NEGLECT



Physical



Emotional

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



Mental Illness



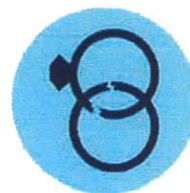
Incarcerated Relative



Mother treated violently



Substance Abuse



Divorce

The Impact of ACEs

BEHAVIOR



Lack of physical activity



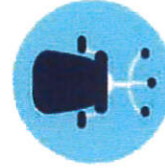
Smoking



Alcoholism

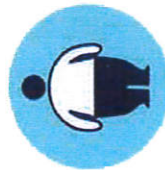


Drug use



Miss work

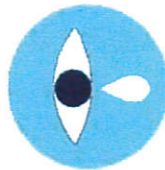
PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH



Severe obesity



Diabetes



Depression



Suicide attempts



STDs



Heart disease



Cancer



Stroke



COPD



Broken bones

Strategies that Address the Needs of Children & their Families



Home visiting to pregnant women and families with newborns

Voluntary home visiting programs can help families by strengthening maternal parenting practices, the quality of the child's home environment, and children's development.



Parenting training programs

These programs work to improve the quality of parent-child relationships and change how parents and children interact with one another.



Intimate partner violence prevention

Teen dating violence can set the stage for problems in future relationships, including intimate partner violence throughout life. Early prevention is needed to help teens develop respectful, non-violent relationship skills that can be carried forward into adult relationships.



Social support for parents

Social support involves guidance, social reinforcement, practical assistance with the tasks of daily living, and social stimulation.



High quality child care

Preschool enrichment is important for long-term development and other outcomes, including violence. Access to high-quality child care is important, too, as it can affect parents' ability to work and to support a family as well as children's exposure to safe, stable and nurturing relationships and environments.



Sufficient income support for lower income families

Living in poverty and low-income conditions can increase the risk for child maltreatment and partner violence. Income supports like cash transfers, tax credits, vouchers for food or housing, subsidies for child care and health insurance, unemployment insurance, or paid leave may provide some relief for parents.