

JOINT COMMITTEE ON CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM OVERSIGHT JUNE 26, 2024

Case Management and Family Preservation Provider Updates

Brenda Watkins, President, EmberHope Connections

Testimony for EmberHope Connections

It has been a fast and furious three months planning for the foster care case management contract transition in Catchment 7. On July 1, we will go live with providing services to over 1,300 youth and their families in SG County. We will continue to move these youth towards reunification with their birth family, permanency through adoption or guardianship, or preparedness for adult living. We will identify youth sixteen and older who may benefit from the new SOUL permanency option that allows them to select their own family. After an 11-year sabbatical, we look forward to our role again as a Case Management Provider (CMP) for the Kansas Department for Children and Families.

I. Transition Plan Update

- a. A transition joint communication was sent by Saint Francis Ministries (SFM) and EmberHope Connections to notify all stakeholders, children and families, and providers about the contract change on July 1.
- b. Our EmberHope Connections sites are nearing completion. We have taken a multiple-site approach to the work to benefit youth, families, and staff. We will have three sites; all are in SG County.
- c. As of June 19, we have hired 295 staff (87% of contract personnel needed).
- d. We have met with SFM Leadership weekly and will continue to do so through at least July.
- e. We have regularly met with DCF (Department for Children and Families) Administration and Regional Office throughout the start-up phase.
- f. Our implementation of several Evidence-Based Practice Models is delayed due to a lack of training capacity among Saint Francis Ministries staff and the time needed for court preparation. Training will start in July, with progressive implementation in the first 180 days.

II. Concerns

- a. Meeting new caseload requirements will not be possible for all staff on July 1. Staff new to the field will start at the contracted requirement, but staff transitioning with the contract will be higher to allow for continuity on a case. The goal is to comply within the first 90 days.
- b. Resources to address both anticipated and unanticipated expenses are higher than expected.
- c. Saint Francis Ministries leadership reports a decrease in the night-to-night placement data, and it is hoped this trend will continue while we explore long-term placement options for the youth.

III. Opportunities

- a. More Therapeutic Family Foster Homes are needed to address the night-to-night placement crisis. Our sister agency, EmberHope Youthville, received a grant to build this capacity in SG County.
- b. Opening the billable mental health codes should help increase access and availability to behavioral health services for children and families. Our sister agency, EmberHope Youthville, will explore increasing clinical services, including attendant care and targeted case management, through these codes.