



Joint Committee on Child Welfare System Oversight June 26, 2024

Chair Concannon, Vice Chair Gossage, Ranking Member Ousley 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. In addition, our full range of behavioral health services includes outpatient treatment and residential services via our Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF) and Qualified Residential Treatment Program (QRTP).

Workforce

Program	Number of Employees
Case Management	190
Residential	76
Support	153
Prevention	43
Foster Care	48
Total	510

TFI continues to make the recruitment and retention of qualified professionals a priority. We recognize the need for manageable workloads which allow child welfare workers to provide a fully array of services designed to meet each family's individualized needs. A variety of strategies have been deployed in our efforts to increase our workforce to allow for the provision of quality services to Kansas families. Some of those efforts include:

- Competitive salaries and benefits package, including generous paid time off (PTO), paid holidays, Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), and tuition assistance for employees who wish to further their education in the field of child welfare
- Annual longevity bonuses based on years of employment

- Remote and hybrid work opportunities which allow flexibility for employees to manage their own schedules
- University and Community College partnerships to develop future child welfare workers
- Social Work practicum opportunities to expose social work students to the field of child welfare
- The development of workforce recruitment and retention strategies around the improvement of employee engagement and a positive organizational culture
- Combatting the negative stereotypes surrounding child welfare through highlighting positive outcomes and successes on social media platforms and through other means

Increasing our workforce and improving engagement and retention in the field of child welfare has not been an easy task, and we continue to make active efforts to address the shortage of qualified professionals. However, TFI has begun to see positive gains from these strategies as turnover in our Case Management program has reduced by over 6% this fiscal year.

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: As the Family Preservation service provider for Western Kansas, TFI provides a variety of supportive interventions within the family home to strengthen the family as they navigate challenges that might otherwise lead to the child being removed from the family and entering foster care. Such services may include behavioral health treatment, tutoring, job-finding and maintenance, the purchase of hard goods, and crisis intervention.

The program is divided into two tier levels for referrals:

Tier 1 service is provided by a Licensed Master Level Clinician consisting of family and individual therapy, incorporating evidenced-based models of Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) and Alternatives for Families Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (AF-CBT). The intervention plan is intense; weekly over the course of 6-8 weeks and is the more intense level of service provided.

Tier 2 incorporates Alternative For Families (AFP), a CBT based alternative intervention developed specifically for Case Managers and Family Support Workers, and Solution Based Case Management.

These practices encourage strength-based skills building and resource development. The intervention is for a three-to-six-month period and is less intensive than Tier 1.

Prevention Families Served since July 1, 2023:

Program	FY 24 (to date)
PCIT	84

Family Preservation Tier 1	255
Family Preservation Tier 2	362
Total	971

Residential Programs

Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF)

Pathway Family Services (PFS), an agency of TFI, operates a 49-bed PRTF in Topeka and serves both males and females between the ages of 6-17. The program has been operating since 2010, serving both children and youth in foster care as well as those who are not in foster care. Children needing this intense level of psychiatric care exhibit significant behavioral health challenges. The facility is licensed by the Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services (KDADS).

Qualified Residential Treatment Program (QRTP)

The QRTP is a non-secure residential, court authorized service for youth in DCF custody. This therapeutic environment includes an evidence-based, trauma-informed treatment model designed to address the needs, including clinical needs as appropriate, of children with serious emotional or behavioral disorders or disturbances. The QRTP opened in 2020 and is licensed for 16 beds.

Teens Reaching Adult Independent Living (TRAIL)

The TRAIL program provides youth aged 17-22 the opportunity to learn essential life skills and practice living independently while still having the support and guidance of caring staff. TRAIL youth reside in fully furnished and equipped residences and are provided a supportive learning environment to develop self-sufficiency skills such as cooking, cleaning and home maintenance. TRAIL has 10 apartments, Independent Living Specialists available 24/7 and licensed therapists to provide behavioral health services onsite. TRAIL staff provide transitional living and community integration program supports.

Residential/Independent Living Youth Served since July 1, 2023:

Program	FY 24 (to date)
PRTF	77
QRTP	27
TRAIL	24
Total	128

Out-of-Home Services

Child Placing Agency (CPA):

We are licensed by DCF to sponsor foster homes throughout the state. We currently serve approximately 412 foster families who are caring for 517 youth in their homes. 35% of the children in our foster homes are served by Case Management Providers other than TFI.

Status of Licensed Homes as of June 16, 2024:

Home Status	Percent of Total Homes
Inactive with no child in placement	8.2%
Active with at least one child in placement	62.62%
Active with no child in placement	13.8%

Case Management Provider (CMP) Services:

TFI serves as the Case Management Provider for Areas 4 (Southeast Kansas) and 8 (South Central Kansas) and we look forward to continuing to do this very important work.

TFI views permanency for children as one of our highest priorities and safely reducing the need for foster care in our service areas has been an area of focus. As of June 18, 2024, we are serving 1,139 children in out-of-home placement. This is down more than 21% since the start of our contract in 2019, and is a 3% reduction in the out-of-home population since the start of FY24. The majority of TFI youth exit care due to reunification with their families, with adoption being the second highest reason for permanency.

Since July 1, 2024, 577 children served by TFI have achieved permanency for the following reasons:

Permanency Type	Number of Youth
Reunification	292
Adoption	144
Guardianship/Permanent Custodianship	34
APPLA	107
Total	577

In addition to the out-of-home population, TFI is serving 273 youth in aftercare.

There are several outcomes defined for children in out-of-home care and I would like to highlight a few we are proud of accomplishing.

- **TFI's Area 4 is currently meeting the Permanency outcome for achieving permanency for children within 12 months of referral (43%).** This is an important outcome as it relates to children exiting foster care without their case lingering for years within the system.
- **TFI's Area 8 is currently meeting the Relative Placement outcome.** This is exciting as data supports that children placed with relatives/people they know have

better overall outcomes than children placed in traditional foster care. TFI also monitors how many children are placed with a relative or non-related kinship home at the time of referral. This fiscal year, 57% of new referrals were placed with a relative/NRKIN the day of referral.

- **Both Areas 4 and 8 have improved placement stability.** Area 4 is very close to the goal of 4.4, having improved from 5.78 at the beginning of the fiscal year, while Area 8 has improved from 5.91 to 5.1. Area 4 is currently leading the state in placement stability rates.
- **Area 8 is meeting the re-entry outcome (8.3%).** This outcome ensures children who achieve permanency do not re-enter foster care and highlights the work of aftercare services for families.
- **Preventing maltreatment in care** is a particularly important outcome. While Kansas as a whole is doing well with this outcome, Areas 4 and 8 are both performing better than the state average in keeping children safe while in out-of-home care.

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

Area 4: Returning re-entry rates back to the fiscal year average after an increase in May, 2024

Improving the number of siblings placed together while in foster care
Continuing to increase the number of children placed with relatives/NRKIN

Area 8: Increasing the number of youth in a family-like setting

Continuing to improve placement stability

Improving the number of siblings placed together while in foster care

Children Overnight in Agency Offices

While not a formal contract outcome, I would also like to highlight TFI's performance as it relates to preventing failures to place (or youth sleeping overnight in offices). TFI has improved placement stability while at the same time preventing youth sleeping in offices. This fiscal year, TFI has had 2 instances of failure to place, with zero instances since October, 2023, accounting for 1% of the total number of failures to place in Kansas this fiscal year.

This has been accomplished through an agency-wide culture that children deserve to have a bed to sleep in. That culture has resulted in partnerships with our CPA, residential and treatment programs, and a very active Relative/Kinship department that have helped us to improve placement stability while identifying appropriate placements for youth. It has not been without its challenges, however. Like all the case management providers, TFI has several youth for whom the appropriate level of treatment has been difficult to access or who have behaviors that make it difficult to locate a foster home or family member willing to accept them into their home. These youth are often physically aggressive and pose a danger not only to themselves, but to agency staff. In those instances, we rely on our strong partnerships with our own and other child placing agencies, as well as treatment programs to find the right service level to meet the needs of the youth in question while working to keep everyone safe.

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. Currently, TFI has 6 youth who are absent from placement; with Area 4 having 2 youth and Area 8 having 4. It is not uncommon for these youth to maintain contact with our Special Response Team via text or phone call even when they avoid providing their location due to the trust the Response Team has built with them. These relationships routinely result in absent youth returning to their placement or other safe environment where we are able to work more closely with them in preventing future running behavior.

SOUL Family

TFI is very excited about the passage of SOUL Family. We are actively working with staff to identify youth who might benefit from this new permanency option and are hopeful that its implementation will offer permanency for youth who might have previously aged out of foster care.

I am pleased to stand for questions and discussion.

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