

thriving

Stories about creating happy childhoods, strong families & healthy communities.

Connection is Prevention:

Relationships & Quality Care
are the Keys to End Suicide



10 | What Parents Need to Know About Anxiety

16 | Alyssa's Dream Family Became a Reality When Her Parents Started Fostering

22 | KVC & St. Louis Children's Hospital Partner to Address the Youth Mental Health Crisis

A Great Culture = The Best Care for Children

At KVC Health Systems, we strive to build a positive, supportive culture. According to our employees' reviews, **KVC ranks in the top 1% of employers nationwide with a high 81 Work Wellbeing score on Indeed**, the world's #1 job site. A great culture means higher staff retention, better service to children and families, and ultimately, better outcomes.

Start your
KVC journey at:

[kvc.org/careers](https://www.kvc.org/careers)

Hear from KVC
team members
on our culture
of engagement.



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO



Dear Friends,

One of our closely held values at KVC is, **“Urgency and innovation mark our approach.”** While we don’t rush, we do help people as quickly as we can, knowing that children and families in crisis depend on our mental health or family wellbeing services.

The innovation part is just as important as urgency. Innovation means using creative thinking and new ideas to solve problems. Innovation is part of our DNA at KVC, and something we focus on every day. Most innovations are **incremental**, small but valuable improvements to a process, program or service. Other innovations are **evolutionary**, stretching in new directions to solve unmet needs or serve new groups of people. Finally, the biggest and most exciting innovations are those that are **transformational**. This is when both the solution and the people served are new. Transformational innovation inspires us forward every day, as we work to transform entire health systems. When we succeed,

some of the services we provide today won’t be needed anymore, and we’ll help in new ways. We welcome that day when more people are safe and connected to a strong family and a healthy community.

In this issue of *Thriving*, you’ll read stories that highlight the power of innovation:

- ▶ In **Connection is Prevention: Relationships & Quality Care are the Keys to End Suicide** (pg. 6), you’ll read how we’re innovating mental healthcare in local communities. Just as public education has reduced the U.S. smoking rate to one-third of what it previously was, our team is working to prevent and end suicide by surrounding people with hope and help.
- ▶ In **Two New & Innovative Opportunities for Teens in Foster Care** (pg. 18), you’ll learn how we’ve partnered with leading organizations to create new educational and family connection options for teens in two states.
- ▶ And in **St. Louis Children’s Hospital and KVC Missouri Partner to Build State-of-the-Art Children’s Mental Wellness Campus** (pg. 22), you’ll read how KVC is combining its strengths and expertise with one of the premier children’s hospitals in the U.S. to help children in need.

Innovations like these happen every day, thanks to people like you who believe in and support KVC’s mission. Thank you for helping to change people’s lives.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Hooper'.

Jason Hooper
President and CEO





Connection is Prevention: How KVC is Working to End Suicide

Suicide is on the rise, particularly in isolated areas with limited access to mental health care. Learn more about KVC's prevention services and how we as communities can end suicide.

See details on pg. 6

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Fall/Winter 2024-25

Health

10 A Parent's Guide to Childhood and Adolescent Anxiety

Anxiety is one of the most common mental health challenges among children and teens. Learn about the different types of anxiety KVC commonly treats and how you can support children in their mental wellness.



Strengthening Families

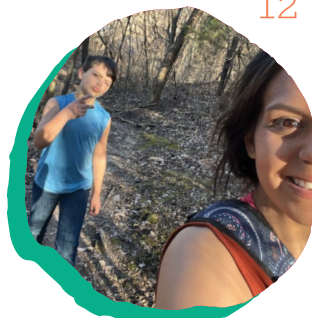
9 Introducing a New Program for Pregnant Mothers in Kentucky

In a new holistic, preventative program called Elevate Mothers and Build Addiction Recovery in Kentucky (EMBARC), KVC and partners support expectant mothers in recovery.



12 A Mother's Triumph: Aby and Ashton's Inspiring Reunification Story

Discover hope and the power of second chances. After her son entered foster care, Aby's commitment to recovery and reunification allowed her to bring her son safely home.



KVC MISSION:

To enrich and enhance the lives of children and families by providing medical and behavioral healthcare, social services and education.

Creating Families

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Meet Children Who Need a Forever Family: Chase, Jacob, Breanna and Daisy are each waiting for a loving adoptive family. Learn more about these youth, including their unique personalities, strengths and interests.



16 How One Young Girl's Dream Led Her Family to Become Foster Parents

Alyssa's wish for a sister inspired her parents to become foster parents with KVC West Virginia. Discover how foster care changed her family's life!



18 Two New & Innovative Opportunities for Teens in Foster Care

Introducing SOUL Family and Middle College! We're thinking outside the box when it comes to foster care. In Kansas and West Virginia, KVC is offering creative new programs to teens in foster care to provide them with the support they need to enter young adulthood.

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At KVC, we are committed to providing a positive, supportive work environment where each person loves doing meaningful work. To honor the positive impact we're creating on our employees' wellbeing, Nebraska Governor Jim Pillen recently presented KVC with the Governor's Wellness Award.

20 People on the Move

See our leaders across the country who were recently hired, promoted, or recognized for their accomplishments.

22 St. Louis Children's Hospital and KVC Missouri Partner to Build State-of-the-Art Children's Mental Wellness Campus

Two of Missouri's leading children's healthcare providers aim to address the urgent pediatric mental health crisis. The partners plan to replace aging buildings on KVC Missouri's campus with a new world-class children's mental health hospital and outpatient services.



23 Celebrating 25 Years of Compassion in Action at KVC Kentucky

In 2024, KVC Kentucky proudly celebrates 25 years of impactful, community-first services for children and families.



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Connection is Prevention:

Relationships & Quality Care are the Keys to End Suicide



Tragically, around 50,000 people die by suicide in the United States each year. But even more shocking is the rate at which suicide has increased over the past decade. Suicide does not discriminate, but certain groups — including African American youth, female youth and older adults — have shown extreme increases in suicide over this short time. Among some groups, the increase is nearly 60% since 2011.

While this increase is alarming, there is still hope and we are ready to act. Here at KVC, we know that connection is the foundation for healing. Being connected to family and community support and having easy access to healthcare can decrease suicidal thoughts and behaviors. We have decades of experience serving children, young people and adults at risk of suicide, and have provided life-saving treatment to thousands of people. Here, we'll talk through the science behind suicide risk, how KVC is working to increase access to preventive services, and how each of us can play a part in ending suicide.

What's Driving the Current Suicide Crisis in the United States

For those who aren't struggling, it can be hard to comprehend the kind of pain that would bring someone to consider suicide. Chad Anderson, Chief Clinical Officer with KVC Health Systems, explains suicide this way: "Suicide is an avoidance of current and future pain," he explains.

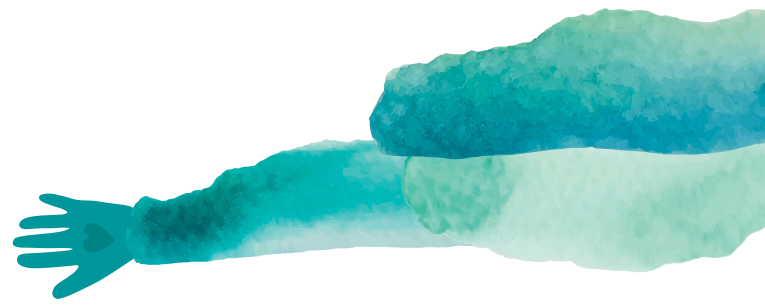


*Chad Anderson,
Chief Clinical Officer*

It's important to remember that behind every statistic is a story, and everyone's experience is different. But while each person has unique, personal reasons for considering suicide, several factors are driving today's current crisis and bringing people to the point of hopelessness.

Anderson points to two leading factors in suicide risk: proximity and connection. First, proximity relates to the nearness of a place, time or relationship. Particularly for those in rural locations, access to physical and mental healthcare is limited and physical closeness to others is limited. Isolation and loneliness increase suicide risk.

"Just like our country has a Bible Belt, it also seems to have a suicide belt," Anderson explains. "And through researching the national heat map of suicide cases, we see this area focused generally West of the Rocky Mountains but is now expanding to other areas, like Kansas and Missouri."



Then there's connection — or in this case, *disconnection*. Technology and social media have impacted the way we relate to others, and the loss of close connections can most definitely still be felt post-pandemic, indicated by the current epidemic of loneliness the U.S. is experiencing, Anderson explains.

KVC's Approach to Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Care

Access to timely, individualized care plays a huge role in mental health crises and suicide prevention. That's why KVC offers a spectrum of care to meet the individualized needs of the communities we serve. This can include in-home therapy, outpatient therapy, teletherapy or online therapy, residential treatment, and inpatient hospital treatment.

When youth are in need of intensive and expert care, they may be admitted to Camber Children's Mental Health (a subsidiary of KVC Health Systems) to receive inpatient hospital or residential treatment. Each year, Camber serves thousands of children and adolescents who struggle with depression, anxiety, substance use, suicidal thoughts, and other psychiatric crises.

KVC has built a positive and successful approach to treating suicidality. KVC has implemented a specialty approach to care, understanding specific suicide drivers and providing trained professionals to promote the best possible outcomes. "I have made it my life's work to ensure KVC has the best of the best in its toolkit for mental health care," Anderson says.

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Getting More Folks Connected to Care & Community



Jason Hooper,
President and CEO

We aim to provide high-quality mental health services as soon as they are needed. And that's why we're growing to meet this rising need. We've partnered with Children's Mercy Kansas City to build a new mental wellness campus in Olathe, Kansas that is scheduled to open in late 2024. Jason Hooper, KVC Health Systems President and CEO shares, "We've seen an alarming increase in mental

health needs for both youth and adults, including increased suicidality. We are proud to expand the life-saving care needed in our community."

We're also proud to announce we've entered a joint venture with St. Louis Children's Hospital to build a new world-class children's behavioral health hospital and residential program in Webster Groves, Missouri. Together, we're addressing Missouri's youth mental health crisis head-on.

Learn more about this exciting new partnership on page 22.

Hope & Healing

KVC wants to ensure everyone in our community is safe and connected. We want them to know they're not alone; that they can build the relationships that can not only carry them through the storm but can also support them in finding growth and joy.



Hear from families we've supported with our mental health care services:

"I couldn't imagine the progress would have been possible without them (Camber). It's not an overnight thing, but it finally got us where we weren't taking four steps back and can actually move forward. The acute stay and family therapy aided us in being confident we can keep our child and family safe now. I would recommend them time and time over. My child can smile and communicate again. We are so thankful for the good people at Camber!"

"They helped us during a very low point in our lives and we are forever grateful."

"You guys have been amazing! My kid ran down the hall to me with life back in his eyes. I have my kid back! Thank you so much for all that you do!"

Be Interventionists

As a society, we're starting to embrace the importance of mental health. But a stigma still remains. Parents and caregivers can help build awareness of mental health through simple conversations with their children.

"KVC has a belief that every interaction is an intervention, and everyone is an interventionist. Each one of us has the opportunity to positively impact another person's mental health by the way we interact, and quite possibly save a life."

— Chad Anderson

Creating connections with family, friends, coworkers, and even people we meet throughout our day truly has the power to help prevent suicide.

If you or someone you know is struggling with suicidal thoughts, don't wait to get help. You can call or text the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988 or chat live at 988Lifeline.org. If you're in Kansas or Missouri, you can also call Camber Children's Mental Health at (913) 890-7468 to find children's mental health treatment near you.

Visit kvc.org/prevention for a library of resources.

Introducing a New Program for Pregnant Mothers in Kentucky



The heartbreaking reality is that support often comes too late for parents who need it. KVC Kentucky recognizes how intentional, proactive support can empower parents and keep families together. That's why we proudly opened the doors to our new EMBARK program.

EMBARC (Elevate Mothers and Build Addiction Recovery in Kentucky) provides proactive support to expectant mothers in recovery. Rooted in KVC Kentucky's tradition of mental health services, substance use treatment, and family strengthening programs, this service aims to support mothers in crisis and change their futures and those of their families. EMBARK is funded by the Kentucky Attorney General's opioid settlement.

KVC initially partnered with Mountain Comprehensive Health Corporation but has quickly expanded to other clinics to provide a coordinated team approach through the EMBARK program. This program ensures high-quality, wraparound services including obstetrics, gynecology, pediatrics, primary care, substance use treatment and additional medical support, helping these mothers receive the care they need.

Mothers undergoing therapy, substance use treatment, or medically assisted care with Mountain Comprehensive Health Clinic are referred to the EMBARK program. After referral, a KVC coordinator assesses needs to determine the best programs and

resources. Mothers then receive professional care and are connected to community resources to establish a solid foundation.

EMBARC stands out for its focus on prevention and intentional intervention. Unlike traditional methods, EMBARK provides:

- ▶ A wraparound service model
- ▶ Community-based professional services
- ▶ Stigma reduction efforts
- ▶ Tangible goods assistance
- ▶ Prevention of welfare system involvement

EMBARC's key difference is its early intervention approach, offering holistic support to mothers to prevent the need for welfare, all in a safe and encouraging environment.

While those receiving support are mothers and babies, EMBARK endeavors to have a ripple effect across families and communities. "This is an opportunity not only to help mother and baby but also to provide the potential to help other children in the home, as more families will be able to remain safely together," says Taylor Breeding, Director of Clinical Services and Programming with KVC Kentucky.



Taylor Breeding, Director of Clinical Services and Programming

Learn more about the EMBARK program, which represents a major advancement in child welfare at KVC. Pregnant women can find more details about this innovative program at KVCKY.org/EMBARC.



From Worries to Wellness:

A Parent's Guide to Childhood and Adolescent Anxiety

If it seems more children are anxious today than ever, you're right. Anxiety has become an increasingly prevalent mental health problem among youth in America today, especially following the stress and isolation of a global pandemic.

There are many theories as to the causes behind this heightened anxiety among youth today. The U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory linking the youth mental health crisis to social media. Anxiety is also common among teens because of the intense amount of changes their bodies and lives go through. Other factors may include personal or familial difficulties, environmental stressors or genetic disposition.

Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety in Youth

It's important to remember that anxiety, like most mental health challenges, looks different for everyone and symptoms will vary. **But you can watch for the following warning signs that may point to a greater issue:**

- › Changes in eating habits (overeating or not eating as much as usual)
- › Changes in sleeping habits (insomnia, frequent nightmares or oversleeping)
- › Difficulty concentrating
- › Complaints of stomach pain, chest pain or other body aches that cannot be linked to a physical problem

- › Becoming angry or irritated more easily than usual
- › Acting out more than usual, including having tantrums or outbursts
- › Frequently feeling restless or fidgety
- › Constantly worrying or having negative thoughts
- › Crying a lot more than usual
- › Clingy behavior or constantly wanting to be held
- › Avoidance of activities or places that were previously part of everyday routines
- › Struggling with suicidal thoughts and hopelessness

Types of Anxiety

Here are several anxiety disorders we commonly treat with mental and behavioral health services at KVC:

- › **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)** generally manifests in children and adolescents as a lot of worry or fear. The youth may overly worry about things like physical appearance, upcoming events, past behaviors and failures or their personal abilities.

- **Panic Disorders** are most commonly characterized by panic attacks. These are episodes of intense fear or anxiety manifested as both physical symptoms and overwhelmed thoughts.
- **Phobias** can vary greatly depending on the child's specific fears. Some common phobias children and teens can experience include fear of an animal or insect, blood, heights, closed spaces (claustrophobia), open spaces (agoraphobia) or flying.
- **Social Anxiety** is a form of phobia specifically relating to fears and anxiety around social situations. This is often experienced as anxiety surrounding social or performative situations like school presentations or social gatherings.
- **Separation Anxiety** is a widespread type of phobia common in children who have experienced a short-term or long-term separation from a parent or another traumatic disconnection, especially in foster care. They may struggle with severe anxiety or panic at the thought of being separated from the person they are attached to.
- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** occurs following a traumatic experience, which is why it is often associated with war veterans. However, PTSD can impact any person of any age. If a child or teen is experiencing fear or stress long after a traumatic event, they may need help learning to cope with what happened.

Helping a Child or Teen with Anxiety

- Acknowledge and validate anxious feelings. Children and teens need to know they are heard and that their feelings matter.
- Stay calm. Your response can help the child or teen feel grounded and cared for, especially during an acute anxiety experience like a panic attack.
- Discourage avoidance. Exposure, paired with professional mental health support, can be a healthy way to learn how to manage their anxiety, especially in a safe, controlled environment.
- Create a mental health toolkit. This can be as simple as a mental health checklist for those anxious moments, including helpful apps like Headspace and ideas for activities that help soothe their anxiety.
- Seek professional support. Therapy and other mental health support are never a bad idea, even if the situation isn't severe or life-threatening. If a child or youth in your care is experiencing symptoms of anxiety, seek mental health support from your nearest KVC Health Systems location or another mental health service provider.



At KVC, our team of counselors and therapists are ready to support children and teens in navigating anxiety. Learn more about how KVC can help at kvc.org/mentalhealth.



A Mother's Triumph:

Aby and Ashton's Inspiring Reunification Story

In 2017, Aby's life took a tumultuous turn as she grappled with addiction, eventually leading to the involvement of Child Protective Services. To ensure her son Ashton's safety, a court made the decision to place him in foster care. This marked the beginning of Aby and Ashton's journey with KVC Kansas, the nonprofit foster care case management provider for their area.

"At the time, I wasn't really trying to get better," Aby recalls. "I had good intentions, but I was deep in my addiction." Aby tried a few "band-aid solutions," she says, for her addiction. But nothing was sustainable enough for her to find lasting recovery.

For two years, Aby had visits with Ashton but no custody. "It was a really isolating, dark place to be in," she remembers. Aby hit rock bottom when she went to jail for a few DUIs. As a result, she went a year without being able to see Ashton and was on the brink of having her parental rights terminated while in jail.

The next morning, right when Aby fully expected to have her rights taken away, she was miraculously given another chance by the judge. She finished her jail sentence and committed fully to working with KVC toward reunification.

The Journey to a Safe Reunification

Aby moved into a women's and children's Oxford House, a supportive sober living environment for people seeking recovery. She gradually began getting more visits with Ashton and was eventually able to have Ashton stay with her for short periods.

Aby worked closely with her KVC caseworker Dalton, who she and Ashton both loved. **"He gave me so much good feedback and was genuinely trying to help me get Ashton back,"** Aby reflects.

Once Aby felt comfortable in her own sobriety, she moved into her mom's house to begin preparing to safely reunify with Ashton. She worked hard to get his room ready with an adventure theme, inspired by their shared love of the outdoors. And after four long, heartbreaking years, Aby was finally able to bring her son home.

Foster Parents' Role in Reunification

While the goal was always to get Ashton reunified with Aby, he spent a lot of time in foster care before then. His final foster parents, Darren and Annie, became family to him. *"They love Ashton as their own and they stepped up in a lot of ways that I couldn't at the time,"* shares Aby.

Ultimately, Ashton's foster parents were able to help him reconnect with his mom and they remain in his and Aby's lives to this day. While staying connected isn't always possible or ideal in reunification, it can create a beautiful opportunity for the child to have an even bigger network of love and support.

Aby also enjoys paying it forward, talking with other families at her church who are considering becoming foster parents and encouraging them in their foster care journeys. "I think fostering is absolutely amazing," Aby said. "Foster parents get to be that stepping stone, and they get to love and support that biological parent and love and support that child until they get to be with their parents."

A New, Hopeful Adventure

Two years later, Ashton is now nine years old and has grown a lot since they first reunited after foster care. Aby said that it took her some time to learn how best to be his parent, but she works hard every day to stay sober and be the best mom she can be. To that end, she goes to parenting classes, attends meetings almost every day and has a sponsor. Aby and Ashton have also done a lot of therapy together, which Aby says can be transformational for reunified families.

Ashton and Aby spend as much time as they can outdoors, even when it's raining! They share a love of hiking and soccer, and Ashton has fallen in love with fishing. "I don't like fishing, but I do go fishing," Aby laughs, wanting to do the things her son loves even if they're not her favorite. They are also very deeply involved in their church community, and Aby credits her faith for her recovery and reunification.

Learn how we support families safely coming back together at kvc.org/reunification.

Start a new Tradition!

Sign up to be a
Holiday Hero!



Promoting a Wellness-Driven Workplace



As an organization dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of people in our care, KVC Nebraska has created a workplace that promotes employee wellness. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) honored our efforts, and KVC Nebraska is the newest recipient of the Governor's Wellness Award!

We were humbled to be among 27 exceptional organizations when Governor Jim Pillen and the Nebraska DHHS announced the Governor's Wellness Award recipients.

The Governor's Award recognizes Nebraska organizations advancing employee health and wellbeing, serving as models and inspiring others. The award has three categories: Sower (starting initiatives), Grower (seeing results) and Harvester (demonstrating improvements). KVC

Nebraska recently received the Grower Award for its groundwork in employee wellbeing.

"This is the first year that KVC Nebraska applied for an award of this kind and it's an honor to have been selected!"

said Sarah Nixon, a leader within KVC Nebraska's developmental disabilities services team.

Nixon also emphasized that employees are more than just workers: "It's not productive for employers to assume that employees don't have other needs beyond what directly relates to the job itself."

When looking at a person's overall wellness, there are five pillars KVC Nebraska focuses on: career, social, financial, physical and community wellbeing.

Undoubtedly, a positive work environment leads to engagement and productivity. Subsequently, the employees, the organization and the community all benefit. At KVC, our mission of connection, community and wellbeing is core to what we do. And it's reflected in our 81 Work Wellbeing score on Indeed which places us among the top 1% of employers nationally.

Supporting our employees as they positively impact clients' lives is crucial. Receiving the Governor's Grower Award signals greater potential ahead.

Start your career with us and experience a wellness-first organization at kvc.org/careers.

"At KVC, engagement is important to us. So, we are always trying to do what's best for our employees, because when they can come to work as their whole fulfilled self, then they're better employees."


— Sarah Nixon

Meet Children Who Need a

Forever Family

We're honored to play a role in matching children with loving adoptive families in multiple states. Due to our role as a lead foster care agency in Kansas, we're able to share photos and videos of Kansas children like those below at adoption.kvc.org. To inquire, contact KVC Kansas' adoption team at 1-888-655-5500 or adoptionsspecialist@kvc.org. To see children near you who need adoptive families, visit AdoptUSKids.org.

CHASE (15)

 Learn more about me!

Chase enjoys activities that keep him mentally stimulated or allow him to work with his hands. He'd benefit from a family who allows him to work on fun projects with them! Some of his many talents include playing the guitar and drums. Naturally, his favorite class at school is band! He likes things that relate to technology, as his computer skills are unmatched!




BREANNA (17)

 Watch my video online!

Happy, healthy, sweet and loving is how most people would describe BreAnna. She enjoys camping, horseback riding and going to horse camp. In fact, she'd like to be a horseback rider when she grows up! BreAnna also likes playing with Legos, toys and dolls, coloring, doing arts and crafts and using her imagination. Her favorite class in school is science because she likes to learn about animals. BreAnna does best in a structured environment, with pre-established expectations. She needs a family that will love her unconditionally and support her in all areas of her life.



JACOB (14)

 Learn more about me!

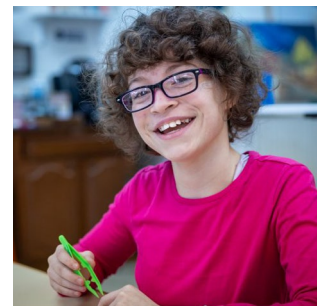
Jacob is a fan of watching the Kansas City Chiefs and would like to play for the Chiefs when he's older. A few of his other favorite activities include riding bikes, swimming, listening to music, creating art, playing video games, and learning about sports cars. He has a great sense of humor and would bring a great deal of laughter, love, and energy to a "no matter what" family! Jacob does best with a consistent schedule with built-in quiet time, as well as clearly established expectations, and supervision. He needs a family that enjoys laughing and having fun and that is knowledgeable about parenting children who have experienced trauma.



DAISIE (12)

 Watch my video online!

Full of laughter and positive energy, Daisy is a one-of-a-kind personality! Daisy is known as a playground pro, where you can find her successfully swinging on the monkey bars or landing a flip. Once she's done on the monkey bars, Daisy is eager to shoot hoops. She has a knack for basketball! You can always count on Daisy to lighten the mood through song and dance. Daisy is good at communicating her needs and is known to be quite honest. Daisy would benefit from a small family, capable of offering structure and patience. She deserves to have a supportive, loving family. At this time, Daisy's case team is only considering families residing in the state of Kansas.



How One Young Girl's Dream Led Her Family to Become Foster Parents



Sometimes it takes the heart of a child to make a difference in the world. Meet Alyssa, a child whose wish for a sister changed her family forever. She played a big role in guiding her parents to foster care and becoming foster parents, and now she has four new sisters.

Alyssa grew up with two older brothers, but she had always wanted a sister — or, in her words, “a built-in best friend.”

“I grew up knowing the Easter Bunny brought candy, the Tooth Fairy brought me change and Santa Claus brought toys,” Alyssa says. “But I never really wanted any of that stuff though. I wanted a sister. I wanted a sister so badly, more than anything.”

Her opportunity to get her very own sister came when she received a flyer at school from KVC West Virginia, sharing our need for foster parents. She excitedly brought the idea to her parents. Her mother, Felicia, and stepdad, Adrian, initially didn't match Alyssa's enthusiasm. To set expectations, they explained that becoming foster parents would not guarantee that a girl would come live with them, let alone one her age.

But a few months later Alyssa was in for a huge surprise. She was returning home from summer camp, and Alyssa's mother, Felicia, had big news to share; special guests were on their way! Three girls

were going to be coming to stay with them: a seven-year-old, a three-year-old and a baby. Although these three little girls may not stay with her family forever, Felicia emphasized, **Alyssa was thrilled to finally have not one, but three sisters!**

Despite Alyssa's excitement, she was about to learn the sadder and more difficult parts of what it meant to be a foster family. Through no fault of their own, children in foster care have often endured abuse, neglect, or other family challenges.

The oldest girl was very quiet, not speaking to Alyssa for the first week she lived with them. The toddler

was anxious and wouldn't sleep alone. The baby had a cleft palate, which meant she needed a lot of extra care and attention.



Alyssa and Dawn on her adoption day

Things improved gradually over five months, and the three girls adjusted to their new lives as the family grew closer to each other. Then a new sister joined the family: a 12-year-old girl named Dawn who needed a temporary place to stay. "I'm sure this 12-year-old girl never thought she would have such a big impact on a kid like me," reflects Alyssa, thinking back to the girl who quickly became a big sister to her.

As the family grew, many adjustments had to be made. Alyssa's stepdad had to cook for more people, her mom had to manage appointments and activities for four more children, and they all had to learn each other's unique quirks and needs.

"It was a learning experience for everyone, even my parents," Alyssa says. "We made it though, through it all, and that's something I know lots of people can't say."

Not every story of foster care has the same ending. Some children move between multiple placements, some children age out of foster care and still more are safely reunited with their biological parents. But sometimes, the children who join a foster family stay forever. And this was the case for all four of Alyssa's sisters.

Despite the fact her placement was originally meant to be temporary, Dawn was officially adopted by Alyssa's family just over three years later. Four months after that, Everly, Carla and Jess became part of the family permanently, too.

"We like to call that day forever family day," shares Alyssa. After years of living together and already feeling like family, they finally were — in every sense of the word.

Alyssa is now almost 15 years old, and she is extremely passionate about foster care. Foster care brought her three little sisters and one big sister, all of whom have become important parts of Alyssa's life. "I can say that foster care helped me through stuff I didn't know I needed help through," Alyssa shares.

Learn more about the joys of fostering at kvc.org/foster.



Since 2019, vacationing in Michigan has been an annual tradition for Alyssa's family. Without missing a beat, they capture another cherished sisters photo and add it to the collage.

Two New & Innovative Opportunities

for Teens in Foster Care

Preparing for adulthood is exciting, but it can also feel uncertain and challenging. A solid support system can make all the difference during this crucial period. That's especially true for teens experiencing foster care.

While all teens in foster care face challenges, they are felt most acutely by youth who age out of foster care without a permanent family or home. Statistically, these youth are far less likely to graduate high school or go to college. Additionally, their mental, emotional and physical health suffers overall. There's a missing link in the system.

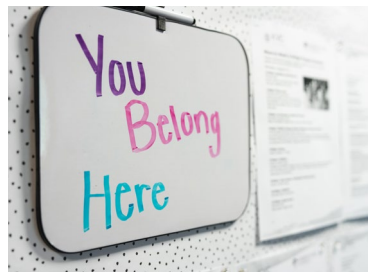
At KVC, we're always working on innovative ways to give teens in foster care the resources they need to grow into their potential. Our teams in Kansas and West Virginia are now offering creative new opportunities that bring foster care into the future.

A Fresh Approach

Everybody needs people to turn to when they're experiencing life's ups and downs. Yet many teens in foster care who haven't found permanency through reunification or adoption enter the adult world without support or family to lean on.

But now, that's changing in Kansas, with a new legal permanency option called SOUL Family. SOUL stands for support, opportunity, unity, and legal relationships. This permanency option allows young people in foster care to develop their own village of caregivers and supportive adults and maintain the benefits of foster care resources even as they reach the legal age of 18.





Moments from the Middle College ribbon cutting & move-in day



Photos provided by Fairmont State University

As any adult can attest, an 18th birthday doesn't magically make an adult. Nurturing and intentional love are imperative throughout adulthood. However, all too frequently children age out of the foster care system before they have found the right connections to care for them.

The need for innovation was clear. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kansas state legislators, the Kansas Department for Children and Families, people with lived foster care experience, and KVC all joined together to develop a new approach to permanency.

KVC Kansas helps youth form their SOUL Family, which might be composed of:

- ▶ Extended biological family members like adult siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles or cousins
- ▶ Family friends
- ▶ Foster parents from previous placements
- ▶ Teachers, coaches or other school leaders
- ▶ Youth leaders or other mentors from a place of worship
- ▶ Community members and neighbors

This relationship-driven model helps keep valuable connections intact and avoids separations that otherwise might occur while navigating foster care.

A SOUL Family empowers youth to enter adulthood feeling safe and connected. Kansas is leading the way in foster care innovation, becoming the first state in the nation to pass legislation recognizing SOUL Family as a legal permanency option.

Bridging the Education Gap with Middle College at Fairmont State in West Virginia:

At KVC, we believe in the power of education to transform lives. That's why we've partnered with others to create Middle College at Fairmont State University, and our first cohort of students began this fall. Middle College at Fairmont State University is an exciting opportunity for teens in foster care to get a jumpstart on college. Here, teens access freedom and stability unlike anything they've experienced before.



This free, two-year program is available for teens 16 and older currently in foster care in West Virginia. The on-campus academic program combines the last two years of high school with some college education, all while giving participating students the full college experience. Middle College students live in a dedicated residence hall together, right in the heart of Fairmont State. KVC provides community-based support services and round-the-clock on-campus assistance at no cost to participating students, creating a nurturing environment where students can excel.

Middle College gives students the opportunity to dive further into areas of interest while earning both a high school diploma and a two-year associate degree (or two years of college credit toward a bachelor's degree). Middle College also goes beyond academics; here, students also learn life skills, like budgeting, time management, career development, and self-care that will support them in adulthood.

Connection plays a key role during these years. Middle College students join a cohort of peers who all live within the same residence hall, bringing together students who have experienced foster care and are working to grow in friendships and resilience. Students are also encouraged to maintain relationships with their current foster care family, adoptive family, biological family, friends, service providers, and their local community.

We're proud to provide opportunities for West Virginia youth to embark on a unique pathway to success!

Learn more about these innovative new opportunities at kvc.org/middlecollege and kvc.org/soul

People on the Move

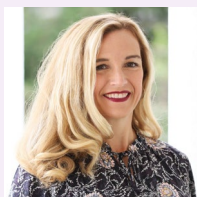


PROMOTION

Kimberly O'Connor-Soule, LCSW

Senior Inpatient Officer
Camber Mental Health (Olathe, KS)
12 years with KVC

Kimberly oversees inpatient mental health hospitals, residential treatment, admissions, clinical quality, and operations across all Camber locations.



PROMOTION

Erin E. Keltner, MSW LCSW LICSW

President
KVC West Virginia (Charleston, WV)
19 years with KVC

Erin leads the caring, clinically rich KVC West Virginia team to provide child and family therapy, foster care, education, and other community services statewide.



PROMOTION

Robert "Bobby" Eklofe, MHSA

Executive Vice President of Inpatient Operations
Camber Mental Health (Kansas City, KS)
34 years with KVC

In this role, Bobby manages administrative functions including contracts, accreditation, compliance, facilities, and new business development for the Camber Mental Health network, which is growing from three hospitals to five.

PROMOTION



Travis Adams, LPCC

KSTEP Program Director
KVC Kentucky
11 years at KVC

Travis oversees our Kentucky Strengthening Ties & Empowering Parents (KSTEP) program which serves families who are affected by substance use and involved with the child welfare system.

NEW HIRE

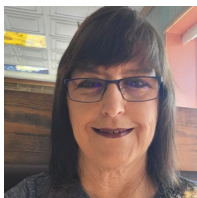


Emma Brink

Marketing & Communications Director
KVC Health Systems (Olathe, KS)

Emma leads marketing and communications for Camber Mental Health. She helps drive brand awareness and lead generation, customer experience, and financial growth.

PROMOTION



Kathryn Anderson

Senior Director of Regional Development
KVC Foundation (St. James, MO)
10 years with KVC

Kathy secures major gifts, event sponsors, and attracts new individual, corporate, and local agency gifts. She secures Holiday Heroes, School Supplies and Hygiene Kits for St. James, MO and beyond.

NEW ROLE



Krista Bundy, LMSW

Director of Prevention Services
KVC Kansas (Overland Park, KS)
8 years with KVC

Krista oversees prevention programs including 2Gen, Batterer's Intervention Program with Adults and Youth, Missing Youth and Rapid Response Team, and Healthy Families America.

PROMOTION



Dani Badas, MSW

Senior Director of Grant Development
KVC Foundation (Olathe, KS)
11 years with KVC

Dani leads the KVC Foundation's grants team, leading strategic research, coordination, submission and tracking of public and private grants to meet the development goals of local KVC teams.

PROMOTION



Cheryl Costabile, MA, LCPC, LPC

Senior Clinical Director
KVC Missouri (Kansas City, MO)
3 years with KVC

Cheryl assists with the coordination of programs, ensuring effective treatment services, compliance with regulations, and the integration of care across various settings.

PROMOTION



Dr. Pamela Dawson
Vice President of Education
KVC Missouri (Lebanon, MO)
6 years with KVC

Dr. Dawson acts as a community and statewide liaison for our education department. She oversees the curriculum and her team of educators, supporting the emotional and academic growth of students.

NEW HIRE



Christina Moore-Ramey, CRCR
Senior Director of Revenue Cycle Management
KVC Health Systems (Olathe, KS)

Christina oversees the revenue cycle process with the goal of collecting revenue for healthcare services provided and improving cash flow.

PROMOTION



Chasity Finkemeier
Director of Education, Lebanon
KVC Missouri (Lebanon, MO)
6 years with KVC

Chasity has served KVC Missouri in the roles of Lead Teacher, Process Coordinator, and now, our new KVC Academy Director. Chasity has been a huge asset to the growth and stability of the Lebanon program.

PROMOTION



Tamara Nichols, MSW LGSW
Regional Director
KVC West Virginia (Logan, WV)
21 years with KVC

Tamara oversees our team of therapists, foster/adoptive case managers, and administrative assistants in the western region of West Virginia, ensuring KVC offers the highest-quality services.

NEW HIRE



Troycia Gilmore
Director of Payroll
KVC Health Systems (Olathe, KS)

Troycia is responsible for ensuring all employees are compensated accurately and in a timely manner according to policies and regulations.

PROMOTION



Rod Sansom, MSW
Director of Grant Development
KVC Foundation (St. Louis, MO)
3 years with KVC

Rod identifies and secures grant funding for important programs in Missouri and Nebraska. His efforts are crucial in ensuring we can continue providing vital services to those in need.

NEW HIRE



Tara Goins, LMSW
Director of Operations
KVC Missouri (Columbia, MO)

Tara oversees our children's residential treatment program in Columbia. As a licensed master social worker, she brings over 15 years of experience in child welfare.

NEW ROLE



Jerilyn Smith, LMSW
Director of Specialized Programs
KVC Kansas (Olathe, KS)

Jerilyn leads initiatives supporting older youth currently and formerly in foster care. She also leads a team of caring professionals working with youth who have exited foster care.

PROMOTION



Melissa Miller
Director of Utilization Review
KVC Missouri (Webster Groves, MO)
13 years with KVC

Missy brings her expertise and vision to our Utilization Review process, ensuring youth receive the care they need in partnership with our healthcare providers and insurance companies.

PROMOTION



Candice Vowels, MS
Director of Referral and Support Services
KVC Kentucky (Louisville, KY)
5 years with KVC

Candice oversees our partnership with the KY Department of Child Services in Jefferson County, KY. In this work, we partner with DCBS to complete family assessments and connect families with resources.

PROMOTION



Molly Moody
Internal Communications Director
KVC Health Systems (Olathe, KS)
3 years with KVC

Molly leads nationwide employee communications to inform, inspire and engage KVC employees. Her role is also infused with KVC's employee engagement efforts providing content with heart.

NEW HIRE



Roy White
Director of Residential Treatment
KVC Missouri (Kansas City, MO)

Roy leads our children's residential treatment at KVC Niles. His role focuses on enhancing the quality of care and providing support to both staff and residents.

St. Louis Children's Hospital and KVC Missouri Partner to Build State-of-the-Art

Children's Mental Wellness Campus

St. Louis Children's Hospital (SLCH) and KVC Missouri (KVC) recently announced a partnership to build a new mental wellness campus in the St. Louis, MO area. The partners aim to address the region's urgent pediatric mental health crisis by replacing older buildings on KVC's campus with a new children's behavioral health hospital and outpatient treatment center.

National and local data show that Missouri youth are facing unprecedented anxiety and depression, as well as increases in youth suicide and suicidal ideation. Hospital emergency departments are seeing more children with severe mental health needs, yet they lack sufficient resources to provide the care they need. A shortage of beds for inpatient behavioral health treatment is causing children and families to experience delays in admissions, lengthy waitlists, and long travel times to find appropriate treatment.

"Suicide is the second leading cause of death for 10- to 14-year-olds in Missouri, yet St. Louis and surrounding areas have fewer than half of



Trish Lollo, St. Louis Children's Hospital President

the psychiatric beds needed to address this crisis," said St. Louis Children's Hospital President Trish Lollo. "We're proud to join forces with KVC to create real solutions to improve children's mental health, increase access to expert treatment, and ultimately, help save lives."

SLCH and KVC recognize the urgent need in the area. The plan, as envisioned, would replace older buildings on KVC Missouri's existing Webster Groves campus with a new world-class children's behavioral health hospital, as well as an outpatient treatment center. Within the new facility, children would be cared for by experienced and specially trained pediatric behavioral health experts from Washington University School of Medicine and KVC. KVC Academy Edgewood, a K-12 therapeutic school, and the historic Rock House will remain on campus as well.

As a mental wellness campus, the grounds will reflect a serene healing environment with pediatric beds, private courtyards, and spaces for recreation, activities and dining. The overall design will be centered on supportive care and treatment spaces, patient wellness, connection with nature, and patient and staff safety.

St. Louis Children's Hospital, part of BJC Health System, is one of the country's premier children's hospitals and its current behavioral health program is staffed by Washington University pediatric specialists. It continuously ranks as one of *U.S. News & World Report's* Best Children's Hospitals. WashU Medicine is a global leader in academic medicine, including biomedical research, patient care and educational programs.

"We see every day the life-saving impact access to compassionate and trauma-informed treatment can have," said KVC Missouri President Lindsey Stephenson. "Our relationship with St. Louis Children's Hospital will help us provide kids and families with the support they urgently need in a world-class facility staffed by the region's leading experts in pediatric mental health."



Lindsey Stephenson, KVC Missouri President

The project is expected to take 18 to 24 months to complete. Learn more at kvcmo.org/leadingchange



Celebrating 25 Years

of Compassion in Action in Kentucky

For those we serve, our team, and our communities, this year is a big one! In 2024, KVC Kentucky celebrates 25 years of providing in-home, strengths-based behavioral health care and family strengthening support for children and families across the state! From our roots in a tiny private practice above a little post office in Paris, Kentucky, to the extensive network of offices across the 78 counties we serve today, KVC Kentucky has always had a heart for providing wraparound services that put children and families first.

While our roots date back to 1999, the organization didn't begin as part of KVC Health Systems. KVC Kentucky started as a private practice called Croney and Clark, Inc. It was founded by Elizabeth (Liz) Croney, a licensed clinical social worker, and

her spouse Dr. James (Jim) Clark, Associate Professor in the College of Social Work at the University of Kentucky at the time. Together, they shared a vision to serve the most vulnerable populations in their community.

KVC Kentucky has had many incredible milestones, from developing and piloting impactful programs enjoying exciting seasons of growth and expansion. Here's a timeline of some of our greatest accomplishments.



2010

Expanded into Eastern and Northeastern Kentucky with new family preservation contracts that safely prevent the need for foster care.

2018

Partnered with Jefferson County (Louisville area) Department for Community-Based Services to enhance child abuse investigations and family support.

2021

Awarded six of eight state contracts for family strengthening programs, expanding to 78 counties and over 300 staff.

2005

Launched the Diversion Program to support children at risk of being removed from their homes, expanding from one office to eight regions.

2012

Awarded multiple family preservation programs, growing from three to eight offices and covering 60 counties.

KVC Kentucky Regions for Family Strengthening Services



Looking to the Future: KVC Kentucky's Next 25 Years

Our vision is for the individuals we serve to be safe and connected to strong families and healthy communities. Looking ahead, we aim to expand into prevention by offering early support to families in need. You can play a role in our next chapter!

We need volunteers, donors, and supporters. Join us at kvc.org/involved



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