



# Kansas Children's Service League

Stronger families start here.

## Joint Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice Oversight Chair Representative Jennings October 26, 2021

Thank you for inviting me today. I am Gail Cozadd, CEO for Kansas Children's Service League (KCSL). KCSL is a statewide private, non-profit, 501(c)3 serving children and their families. We are the Kansas Chapter for Prevent Child Abuse America. KCSL works to create, repair and restore healthy parent-child relationships which are the foundation of a strong family. This work fosters long term positive impacts on all Kansans, not just those we serve directly.

Our work with children and families improves school readiness now so that graduation rates improve in the future. We help families succeed now to be better parents and better employees. We are creating a stronger, more resilient and educated workforce for the future of Kansas. The progress made now reduces future crime and incarceration, breaking a destructive cycle. This improves prosperity and success for all Kansas communities.

KCSL's evidence-based programming works with children and families in the areas of health, safety, and education to succeed and break cycles of neglect, abuse and trauma. Our programs help both children, youth and parents develop skills for success in their families, schools and work places.

Our annual budget for 2020 was \$19.8 million with approximately 60% of the funding from a variety of state departments, including the Department for Children and Families, the Attorney General's Office, the Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund, the Department for Health and Environment, and the Department of Corrections.

There is over 30 years of research now about the impact of childhood adversity. **Childhood adversity includes abuse and neglect as well as other household dysfunctions or circumstances which affect children adversely, including substance use, mental illness of a parent, domestic violence, and criminal behavior-all of which place a child or youth at higher risk of entering the foster care or juvenile justice system.** The childhood trauma stemming from adversity can have a profound impact on social connections, school readiness, and an 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.

BUT we also know from more recent research children and adults who have experienced adversity have great capacity to also build resiliency.



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**Providing children, youth and their parents stable, responsive, nurturing relationships can prevent or even reverse the damaging effects of early life stress, with lifelong benefits for learning, behavior, and health.**

KCSL becomes that support system for children, youth and parents when they have nowhere else to turn.

KCSL has long supported the juvenile justice reform in Kansas. We know now that a child's brain and ability to perform executive functioning-the ability to think through the consequences of your actions-is not fully developed until the age of 25. Youth need guidance and support when they make a mistake, they need the opportunity to learn from that mistake. Despite the positive impact KS has seen with the decrease of juveniles who are incarcerated; we continue to see youth who need this guidance and support-and often their parents are not sure where to turn.

KCSL like many other community-based organizations provides programs which are nationally recognized as well as local programs which have been researched and evaluated and proven to be effective. The Center for Restorative Education is one of those programs. The Center for Restorative Education is a program done in partnership with three Unified School Districts in Shawnee County. This began as a credit recovery program for youth who have been long-term suspended or expelled from their home school. Over the years it has evolved into a robust program which also addresses critical issues with the youth served to help resolve the problems which brought the youth to our attention. The program works with youth on self-regulation techniques like yoga and meditation. The program helps the youth to learn better communication skills and working in a team setting. The program is connected with three private mental health providers to begin to assist with the unaddressed mental health and substance use issues the youth have.

For the 2019-2020 school year the program served 34 of youth who were long-term suspended or expelled. During the 2020-2021 school year the program served 30 youth, although most of these youth were not suspended. It was an odd year with COVID, and our program provided face to face services and academic support.

Currently we have already received 24 referrals for the 2021-2022 school year.

This year the common themes for referrals are fighting in the school, possession or drugs or under the influence of drugs, and possession of a weapon. These are fairly typical referrals for the youth we serve. Many of these youth with the change in the juvenile justice system no longer become an adjudicated juvenile offender. Why does that matter? It matters because it means programs like the Center for Restorative Education are not able to access juvenile justice funds-despite the fact that these are youth who clearly need guidance and support.



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The Center for Restorative Education is a fairly unique program in KS. Many school districts provide credit recovery for suspended students-but school districts do not always have the ability to provide the additional guidance and support these youth need. From 2011 to 2015, KCSL asked the University of Kansas, Center for Public Partnerships and Research to conduct an independent evaluation of the program. Through that research there were key findings:

- 1) The students increased their daily attendance rate.
- 2) The students were able to complete at least 3.7 credit hours or a semester; ensuring they did not follow further behind.
- 3) With a pre and post self-assessment youth improved their scores in intrapersonal strength, school functioning and affective strength.
- 4) The students who attended the program had an 79% graduation rate; compared to the state's graduation rate of 32% for youth who had been suspended or expelled. KCSL has continued to be higher than this state average since the final evaluation in 2015.

Youth served in programs like the Center for Restorative Education are at risk of out of home placement either through foster care or juvenile justice. However, youth learn new coping skills and have a greater chance of graduating from high school. These are critical for our future workforce and decreasing future adult incarceration.

I would like to ask this committee to consider the current limitations regarding the Juvenile Justice Improvement Fund.

- 1) How evidence-based programming has been defined in the past. This should include programs and services which have demonstrated effectiveness through scientific research and evaluation as well as promising practice programs if it is tied to a researcher and specific data points are identified.
- 2) Expanding the definition of the youth eligible for the funding to include youth who are eligible for level one diversion.

I do want to recognize the Kansas Department of Corrections for their continued efforts to listen to the community. Recently they released an RFP which focused on serving youth who are at-risk of entering the juvenile justice system; including crossover youth, homeless youth, and runaway youth. Additionally, in the RFP jobs and workforce development programming was identified as a priority area.

Thank you for inviting me to provide you with information about KCSL. I would be happy to meet with you individually for further discussion about programming and the successes KCSL has, if you are interested.

-Gail Cozadd, CEO  
(785) 215-6401



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## Our Mission

To protect and promote the well-being of children.



**128 Years**  
of service to Kansas  
children & families



**Statewide**  
nonprofit 501(c)(3)



**Kansas Chapter**  
Prevent Child Abuse America  
& Circle of Parents®



**Accreditation**  
Prevent Child Abuse  
America & Healthy  
Families America®



**20,000 Children  
& Families**  
served annually



**252 Employees**  
(approximate)



**\$19.5 million**  
Annual budget

## We work to create & restore healthy parent-child relationships.



### child abuse prevention

breaking cycles of trauma to help communities thrive

### school readiness

increasing future graduation rates

### family support

helping families succeed to be better parents

### education services

building a stronger, more resilient & educated workforce

#### Top Administrators

Gail Cozadd, CEO; Margaret La Rue, Foundation President; Timothy A. Shultz, Board Chair

#### Central Office

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# CRE

## Center for Restorative Education

Supporting student success and personal growth for at-risk youth

### RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Students who have been long-term suspended or expelled have realized positive results through CRE educational and case management support.

EVERY DOLLAR  
INVESTED IN CRE  
PROGRAMMING



**\$1**

=

**\$8**



RETURNS EIGHT  
DOLLARS IN LIFETIME  
BENEFITS TO SOCIETY

A recent four-year evaluation and cost analysis of CRE programming revealed that participating at-risk youth experienced significant growth academically and in their overall emotional and behavioral well-being which improves their lifetime earning potential. CRE serves racially and ethnically diverse students in several school districts in the Topeka, KS community.



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## CRE PROGRAM BENEFITS

CRE's innovative, strengths-based approach restores students' ability to function and succeed at school by addressing the behaviors and conditions contributing to their academic struggles. Without CRE, these students would have few, if any, alternatives to engage in educational learning and maintain their credits toward graduation.



## LIFETIME BENEFITS TO SOCIETY



For every 100 youth participating in CRE, the benefit to society is

**\$15 MILLION**

compared to only \$6.6 million for 100 suspended/expelled students who have lower graduation rates