

**Child Welfare Committee**  
**Nov. 16, 2022**  
**Sister Therese Bangert**  
**Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth**

**Some Children Dance**

**To the Music of Life**

**Others**

**Merely cling to Existence.**

**They are all ours.**                      UNICEF

Thank YOU for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

The children that are in the Kansas Child Welfare System

Hold a special place in my heart.

They claimed that place back in 1973

When I went to work at St. Vincent Home here in Topeka.

For three years I was a teacher there.

For six years I was a Child Care worker.

I want to thank EACH of you who have chosen

To be on this Committee.

What I have noted over the past almost 50 years

Is that it can be easy to grab headlines

When there is a tragedy – as with the two recent deaths

In Foster Care.

But it is much harder to find the solutions

To find ways and means to protect the vulnerable Kansas children.

My experiences keep my passion for these children alive:

- After St. Vincent's closed in the early 80's, I kept up with 2 brothers and asked to be their Court Appointed Special Advocate – CASA. I found that the Court had lost them – hadn't even heard their case in several years. They with their sister had spent 3.5 years in an abusive foster care home. The younger of the brothers was adopted and I just became a caring adult in the older brother's life. When he got out of foster care, he showed me what it meant to belong to no one. I continued our relationship -hemmed his first work pants, etc. When he was 22 he started calling me Mom. I was startled. But when you call a Bangert woman Mom, you don't quickly get rid of her. I took him at his word. We have walked the walk – not an honorary title I tell people. He is now 50 years old and is a miracle of good conscious and spontaneous compassion. He is an accomplished fine-dining waiter, but I observe his daily struggles because of the multiple gashes in his spirit because of his childhood.

On Nov. 2<sup>nd</sup> I attended a DCF sponsored presentation:

**"Kansas Practice Model: How Iowa Judges & 4 Questions are Keeping Families Safe & Together."**

This day began with a Conference over Zoom given by Dr. Amelia Franck Meyer. Key points from her that stirred my soul:

- When we remove a child from their family and place them in a totally strange environment, we cause a primal wound.
- Children's brains are wired for Connection or Protection.

- Children DO their feelings do not talk their feelings.
- Many behaviors we see in youth are normal, natural responses to what happened to them.
- The Child Welfare System must make it a priority to connect children to people not services.

Dr. Franck Meyer recommends 4 questions that should be answered before any Court removal order:

1. What can we do to remove danger instead of the child?
2. Can someone the child/family knows move into the home to remove the danger?
3. Can the caregiver and child go live with a relative or fictive kin?
4. Could a child move temporarily to live with a relative or fictive kin?

**Finding these answers is hard work.**

Here are some of the Ongoing Challenges that I have perceived through the years:

#### **Lack of Experienced Workers**

I believe Child Protective Services is the most difficult and the riskiest job in Child Welfare. These positions should ideally be held by the most seasoned workers. Many times recent college graduates end up in these positions. They are excellent learning experiences but the complexity of the families lives is often foreign to the workers. I believe good supervisors can assist with this lack of experience.

#### **Trauma to children being removed**

Dr. Amelia Franck Meyer spoke about the deep trauma caused children that are removed from their homes. She called it a primal wound

#### **Foster Parents**

I have always believed foster parents should be paid and paid well. But I expect a high level of love and care to be given to the children. Several years ago, Rep Brenda Landwehr called together a round table of persons who were players in the Child Welfare System. This included Judges. They noted that their experience is that most foster parents are in it for money.

#### **Judges**

Some Judges made the alarming statement that their experience with making decisions about a child was that they always were striving to choose the best of two bad options . . . noting that there were few good options.

#### **Racism**

Cultural differences between the Child Welfare workers and the families where children are vulnerable can cause increased strain for families and the child.

I believe Dr. Franck Meyer has identified some ways to address these challenges.

Know again of my GRATITUDE for your willingness to be part of being voices for Kansas children.

**We are guilty of many errors and many faults,  
but our worst crime is abandoning the children  
neglecting the fountain of life.**

**Many of the things we need can wait.**

**The child cannot.**

**Right now is the time his/her bones are being formed,  
His/Her blood is being made,  
And his/her senses are being developed.**

**To him(them) we cannot answer 'Tomorrow,' his/her(Their) name is today."** Gabriela Mistral  
(Inclusive language added.)