

Missouri State Foster Care & Adoption Board
Truman Building Room 500
301 West High Street, Jefferson City, MO 65101
Tuesday, June 3, 2025

10:00 am Welcome and Introductions Dana Lopez

10:10 am Approval of Minutes from March Dana Lopez

Motion to approve the Minutes by Craig. All in favor.

10:15 am Leadership Updates Kate Watson

The new leadership team has been in place since March 13. Since then, Sara Smith has outlined a 30-60-90 day plan to guide their initial priorities. Monthly stakeholder meetings focused on child welfare are now being held, with the first taking place last week. Kate will share the relevant information with Melissa, including a registration code for community partners and stakeholders to get involved. There will be opportunities to recruit individuals for engagement at the statewide level. During the first stakeholder meeting, they discussed upcoming initiatives as well as current efforts to develop and enhance systems, including updates to state regulations. Kate offered to share a document that outlines these priorities, which are centered around ensuring safety across all program areas. The first 30 days were focused on assessing current programs and the physical environment of CD. This included a thorough review of available data and an emphasis on building a strong, motivated leadership team.

Leadership roles have been clearly defined:

- **Christina Barnett** oversees Prevention, Administration (including FACES and Constituent Services), and Sex Trafficking Prevention.
- **Marcia Hazelhorst** leads the Safety Division, which includes CAN Investigations, CAN HU, and OHI.
- **Pam Alston**, Assistant Director of Field Operations, supports regional directors and oversees training enhancements and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI).
- **Annie Wilson** is focused on improving training programs, addressing a key factor in staff turnover. Special attention is being given to aligning CWPT more closely with day-to-day field operations.

The 30-60-90 day plan breaks down as follows:

- **First 30 Days:** Assess the landscape, identify key challenges, and begin building relationships to inform next steps.
- **Next 60 Days:** Begin providing targeted program support.
- **By 90 Days:** Conduct a deep dive into data and establish a stable, effective operating rhythm.

Kate will share the full document outlining these plans and priorities.

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10:45 am

Data

Melissa & Abigail

Recent data was shared on the number of foster homes across the state, showing a decline in both the number of children in care and the number of available homes.

In March, there were 3,158 non-relative foster homes statewide. April's regional breakdown was as follows:

- Northwest (NW): 283
- Northeast (NE): 639
- Southeast (SE): 511
- Southwest (SW): 826
- Kansas City (KC): 310
- St. Louis (STL): 547

This totals 3,011 non-relative foster homes for the state in April. A six-month overview of foster care data was also distributed during the meeting.

There was a suggestion to analyze how many of these homes currently have children placed, with particular attention to those with elevated needs.

In terms of relative homes (RH):

- Total: 3,538
- Of these, 1,973 are unlicensed relative homes (RHU).

Quarterly data reviewed included the number of children in care by age and by judicial circuit.

Lauren explained how the total number of children in foster care is calculated and noted that the overall number has decreased in recent years.

Lauren expressed interest in analyzing the number of closed foster homes, specifically those that achieved permanency through adoption, guardianship, or other permanency transitions.

She also pointed out that Children's Division (CD) and Foster Care Case Management (FCCM) agencies may track exit survey data differently.

Currently, CD uses a foster parent portal to collect exit survey data electronically, while some FCCMs have their own systems. Improving consistency in this process could help capture more accurate information about why families close their cases.

There was discussion around the challenges families face navigating the child welfare system and what supports are in place. Efforts are ongoing to proactively address issues identified through the surveys. A question was raised regarding the length of time children spend in care. Lauren confirmed that this information is collected in a separate report.

11:00

Care Portal

Abigail Smith

CarePortal is a Christian nonprofit organization that connects churches, government agencies, and community partners to serve the needs of vulnerable children and families. The platform facilitates care-sharing by allowing anyone to submit a need on behalf of a family, which is then vetted and matched with willing churches or partners to help meet that need.

Partnerships and Coverage

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CarePortal currently operates in 34 counties across Missouri and is actively expanding its outreach, including into Warren, Camden, and Christian counties. The organization works in partnership with school systems, DSS (Department of Social Services), and KVC to identify and support families in need. To activate CarePortal in a county, the following are required:

- A willing agency
- A designated Regional Manager
- At least five participating churches

Once a need is identified and submitted, it goes through an agency for vetting. The agency then has a conversation with the family to confirm they are open to receiving assistance from a local church. If the family declines, the agency seeks an alternative resource. If the family agrees, the Regional Manager reviews the request and may contact the referring individual for more information. The story behind the request is shared with churches—initially without identifying the family. If a church is willing and able to meet the need, they coordinate with the agency to make contact with the family. Meetings may take place at the family's home or at a neutral location (such as a utility office if a bill is being paid).

Impact

- 642 requests submitted
- 88.67% fulfillment rate
- 2,357 children served this year
- 88 beds and dressers recently provided to families
- CarePortal has provided large-scale support, including roofing projects and basic necessities like beds
- Active in 39 U.S. states and Canada

Many churches continue supporting families beyond the initial request, often identifying and meeting additional needs not listed in the CarePortal system. Nonprofits and businesses can also get involved as champions, contributing financially or through in-kind support.

Training and Fees

- CarePortal offers quarterly trainings and meetings
- Some agencies, such as DSS and participating school districts, pay a fee to access the platform

Annual Conference

CarePortal hosts an Annual Conference in Kansas City, where the main office is located. The conference typically occurs in late April and features:

- 3 days of programming
- Motivational speakers
- 52 breakout sessions

Each active county has a designated contact person for CarePortal inquiries. Those interested in getting involved—whether as a church, agency, nonprofit, or business—should reach out to their county's Regional Manager or visit CarePortal's official website for more details.

11:30

Exit Surveys

Melissa Selsor

Melissa noted that the current survey is quite lengthy and expressed interest in receiving feedback on the questions. The survey has not been updated in several years. The board shared several suggestions, particularly related to training-related questions. If the survey is going to be digitized, incorporating open-ended questions may present some challenges.

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There were also suggestions to clarify certain questions—specifically those related to case managers and licensing workers. One idea was to include a dropdown menu with the top five reasons families are closing their cases, to streamline data collection.

Additionally, there was a suggestion to announce the digitized survey in the newsletter to increase awareness and participation. A question was raised about how to accurately capture information for parents who were previously licensed through another agency.

12:30

Board Fund Update

Melissa and Dana

There was a discussion about the next steps for utilizing funds that have been available for several years but remain unused. The annual allocation is \$15,000, though these funds are not guaranteed to be ongoing. They are appropriated by the General Assembly and sourced through gifts, donations, and item transfers. A key question was raised: could there be an opportunity to use these funds to support recruitment and retention efforts? (Refer to timestamp 3:27:00 on Webex.) If the application were published today, reviews would occur in December, but clarity is needed on how long it would take to distribute the funds. The funds could also potentially be directed to FCCMs (Foster Care Case Management agencies) and would likely be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. Lauren noted that funding from the past two years may still be available. Compared to agencies receiving millions of dollars for recruitment, this is a relatively small pool of money, but still significant if used strategically. There was also discussion about the importance of increasing engagement in regional board meetings and how to better connect locally. Currently, there is a need for more voting members at the state level. Several individuals have applied in the past but never received a response, which makes it difficult to move forward with fund-related decisions without a fully seated board. The funds would ultimately be allocated to a child placing agency, with applications being submitted to Dawn. There are approximately 70 licensed child placing agencies eligible to apply. The submission deadline is August 15, with applications reviewed later in August. The process will be first-come, first-served. It was also suggested that the RFP (Request for Proposal) include a page limit to streamline the review process.

1:00

TFC Update

Dana and Melissa

The Treatment Foster Care (TFC) program focuses on providing individualized support for youth with significant needs, with the goal of keeping children in community-based family settings rather than more restrictive care environments. The program has experienced notable growth, with 319 children currently placed in TFC across Missouri. However, families often face long delays in accessing necessary child-specific services, sometimes waiting months or even years for staffing requests to be fulfilled. Miscommunication and misinformation between case managers and families regarding service eligibility further complicate access to care. To address this, training and clarification around the referral process for TFC are needed for case management teams.

Additionally, concerns have been raised about the overall responsiveness of the system. The leadership team must address service delivery grievances to better support families during times of crisis. Amanda Burris specifically highlighted confusion surrounding respite billing

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processes across contracted agencies, prompting a broader discussion among participants about the need for transparency and a simplified explanation of billing procedures for families. Finally, the importance of conducting timely assessments for children's needs upon entering care was emphasized, as this is critical to ensuring appropriate and efficient service delivery.

2025 Meeting Dates

Tuesday, March 4 th	Truman Building Room 500
Tuesday, June 3 rd	Truman Building Room 500
Tuesday, September 2 nd	Truman Building Room 500
Tuesday, December 2 nd	Truman Building Room 500