



**Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice House Committee on Child Welfare &
Foster Care and House Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice
January 18, 2023**

Chair Concannon, Chair Owens
Vice Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Smith
Ranking Member Ousley, Ranking Member Highberger
Members of the Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to share information about service needs for juvenile offenders.

My name is Jeanette Owens, and I am the Chief Child Welfare Officer at DCCCA. We provide child welfare programs including family preservation, We Kan Drive and child placing agency services. Additionally, we provide mental health and substance use disorder treatment, traffic safety, prevention, and research services. DCCCA has served Kansas communities, families, and children for the past 48 years.

Family Preservation Services

DCCCA provides family preservation services for the five counties in the Kansas City region and 10 counties in the Wichita region. We are currently serving 219 families with approximately 495 children in those homes. We are working alongside these families to address mental health needs, housing availability, food insecurities, utility payment issues, safe childcare options as well as additional areas of need. We work with all types of families in Family Preservation, with a wide variety of needs. Our goal is safely maintaining children in the home to prevent foster care. One emerging need we have seen in recent years is the number of families that are referred due to needing support to manage child delinquency behaviors. Not only have we seen increasing numbers of referrals for this reason; what is most concerning is the severity of delinquency behaviors these youth are exhibiting without resources from the juvenile justice system.

We recently collected data on the number of youths that we are currently serving in Family Preservation that also have involvement with the juvenile justice system. Thirty-one of our family preservation youth have juvenile justice involvement:

Youth in Family Preservation services age 10 and over who:

- have had law enforcement calls for behaviors that could result in criminal justice charges, or
- have had law enforcement calls for repeated runaway behaviors, or
- were referred post-juvenile justice system involvement (case closure, probation violation, caregiver refusal to pick up from juvenile intake and assessment), or
- were referred resulting from parent inability or unwillingness to manage child behaviors, or
- are involved in the juvenile justice system through intermediate intervention services or diversion, or
- have an open juvenile justice case (example pending charges, pending disposition, on probation).

Barriers:

- Families with these juvenile justice needs require specific interventions for criminogenic behavior patterns. While DCCCA is very proud of the high-quality work that we do, when we are serving youth with juvenile justice involvement, we need collaboration of our juvenile justice partners to ensure the youth face accountability and learn from their behaviors.
- Family preservation receives referrals for youth with truancy, substance use issues, running away from home, gang activity and other behaviors. Families that have youth with juvenile justice involvement often highlight the gap of available services to meet the family's needs and creates an increased level of concern for our staff to meet those needs. Access to appropriate interventions and resources that assist in holding the youth accountable are not readily available.
- Depending on the reason for involvement, there are times when there are concerns for the safety of the youth, family members, our staff, and the community. We are seeing youth assaultive behaviors often continue to escalate without system response.
- Despite our best efforts, sometimes parents begin to experience being overwhelmed and frustrated in maintaining children in the home without juvenile justice system accountability. This means that youth that could have remained in the home are removed to foster care.

Positive Impacts

We experience success in serving these families when family preservation staff can closely partner with a youth's probation officer. Family preservation focuses on how the parents can work with the youth while the probation officer focuses on the juvenile offender or criminal

behavior. Family Preservation services benefit from partnerships that pair our staff with individuals who have expertise with this population.

We recently had two cases with juvenile justice involvement that went well because the families were motivated to change, staff had some additional expertise and there were available resources in the area. The partnerships between systems and experts increased the opportunities and supports for a successful outcome. The collaboration together helped keep the youth safely in the home and averting a foster care placement.

We urge committee members to identify ways to strengthen juvenile justice system accountability for youth whose parents are seeking community supports to maintain their children in the home.

Thank you for your time today. We appreciate the invitation to join today's conversation and we appreciate the commitment to improving the lives of Kansas children.

Respectfully submitted,

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Questions may also be directed to:
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