



CORNERSTONES
OF CARE

Community Voice

SPRING 2024



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New Strategic Plan Leans Into Prevention

Beginning this year, Cornerstones of Care embarks on a new strategic plan designed to assess our resources and move toward prevention by providing the best possible care with the least disruption to families.

The Bridging Forward plan is designed to provide flexibility to transition to new opportunities while maintaining core aspirations toward the children, families, and communities we serve. The plan, created with input from all Cornerstones of Care team members, looks to continue to develop the resources offered to help children and families heal from trauma.

“Bridging Forward is our commitment to care for the children and families we currently serve while exploring ways to diversify our work to more effectively help more people,” said Cornerstones of Care President and CEO Merideth Rose.

The Executive Leadership Team is assessing programs and innovation to provide the best possible tools for children and families healing from trauma. Cornerstones of Care will continue its traditional work in foster care and adoption but is increasing its focus to expand programs such as Build Trybe, which provides marketable job skills to youth as they transition out of foster care.

Skill development is part of the agency’s commitment to prevention. In the case of Build Trybe, the goal is to reduce chronic unemployment, homelessness, and food insecurity that too many youth face after aging out of foster care.

Presence As Prevention



Recently, I spoke at the Central Exchange to share about our work at Cornerstones of Care, along with my path as a woman executive at a local non-profit organization. A lot of what I spoke about was our presence in the community.

Presence is the third of what we at Cornerstones of Care refer to as the 3 Ps: purpose, people, and presence. My presence in speaking to others at Central Exchange is an important part of sharing our story and helping people better understand the work we do. Frankly, I really enjoy doing it. We are proud of every child who is reunited with their family or finds a forever home. I take great joy in seeing our PATH House renovation covered on the evening news, or when someone spots me in public wearing my jacket with the Cornerstones of Care logo and tells me how much our work means to them.

There is another kind of presence, though, and it's the presence of being accessible to care for families before they are in crisis. In this newsletter, you will see a recurring theme: We want to prevent compounding trauma and respond to families as early as we can.

We are proud of the work we do within the states of Kansas and Missouri, and frankly, our people are good at providing services involving therapy and support, foster care and adoption, and education and training. We look forward to continuing our state-contracted work. We also want to assess opportunities, find funding, and provide services that will help families before someone has to make a hotline call concerning the safety of a child.

In some cases, expanding our presence means finding new ways to grow our existing programs to reach more people or create wraparound services. This is the case with Behavioral Intervention Support Team (BIST) In-Home services, which took the philosophy used by more than 300 schools across the country and provided parents with many of the same tools. This offshoot program gives parents more confidence in managing behavioral challenges and their children more consistency at school and at home.

Cornerstones of Care has evolved a great deal during its 154-year history, and we will continue to look for ways to responsibly evolve in the future as we help children and families heal from trauma.

Merideth Rose, President and CEO

New Strategic Plan Leans Into Prevention

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In other instances, prevention means continuing to take the least disruptive path to working through trauma. For example, our Kansas team reduced the number of youth removed from homes by 36 percent in our foster care work in Wyandotte, Leavenworth, and Atchison counties.

“Our goal is to engage with families in ways that don't begin with a hotline call and safety concerns,” said Chief Programs and Innovation Officer Justin Horton. “We want to help at a community level before state child welfare system intervention is necessary.”

To that end, Cornerstones of Care is continuing its Kansas work in Functional Family Therapy, which can be accessed by families outside the child welfare system, and in Family Preservation. Our outpatient therapy programs in Missouri have expanded from one school district to

three and are beginning to provide therapy to students in Eastern Missouri.

This year, thanks to a \$750,000 grant from the St. Louis County Children's Service Fund, Cornerstones of Care is expanding its impact in St. Louis schools. This grant will fund two new therapist positions to provide trauma-informed therapeutic counseling services and brings Behavior Intervention Support Team (BIST) services to 11 buildings in the Hazelwood School District.

“I am reminded of the quote by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who said, ‘There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in,’” said Merideth. “With our new strategic plan, we want to prevent compounding trauma and sharpen our response to it.” *

Outpatient Therapy Program in St. Louis Sees Significant Post-COVID Growth

Clinical Manager Laura Nolan joined the Outpatient Therapy team in St. Louis just two months before the onset of COVID-19, which abruptly halted in-person services. At the time, the St. Louis therapy office housed just two full-time therapists who were used to seeing clients in the office and schools and had to quickly pivot to online services.

This arrangement continued until September 2021, when Cornerstones of Care received \$75,000 from the St. Louis County Children's Service Fund as part of an emergency pandemic response.

This funding allowed the Eastern Region to hire an additional Treatment Foster Care (TFC) Specialist and another mental health therapist.

As more therapists were hired, the program's impact grew, and the family-centered approach to therapy was finding success in the community and local school districts. Once schools officially reopened for in-person learning, Cornerstones of Care began looking for ways to continue growing.

In March 2023, Cornerstones of Care was awarded a three-year \$750,000 grant for the “Stop Violence in Schools” program. The grant funded two new therapist positions to provide school-based trauma-informed therapeutic counseling services in the Mehlville and Parkway School Districts. It also set the stage for implementing Behavior Intervention Support Team (BIST) services in 11 buildings in the Hazelwood School District.

In just three years, the St. Louis team grew from a team of two to seven full-time therapists, with all signs pointing to continued growth.

“Since implementing the “Stop Violence in Schools” initiative, Mehlville and Parkway have provided glowing reviews of our services, especially our therapists,” said Laura. When students are suspended, they are linked to mental health therapy services through Cornerstones of Care. Preliminary reports suggest that having a therapist

at alternative school sites with these students helps reduce instances of further disciplinary action.

A similar approach has been part of our success with partnering with other Cornerstones of Care programs. Community Counseling in the Eastern Region provides therapy services to children and youth in our Treatment



Foster Care homes and Pathways Transitioning Living programs as they enter care. When people are connected to services quickly, the healing can begin sooner.

“I feel like people are more in tune now to risk factors for children and want to refer to therapy,” said Laura.

Much of this success stems from the strong relationships Cornerstones of Care has built with school districts, coupled with a more proactive approach to identifying children and families needing mental health support.

Cornerstones of Care has also seen significant growth in other Outpatient Therapy programs, including Family Functional Therapy services offered in parts of Kansas and Missouri. Visit our website to learn more about our therapy services and how you can connect to a therapist near you. *

SHARE THE LOVE ALL YEAR

Through monthly giving, we're offering you a seamless way to share the love and to help build safe, healthy communities alongside Cornerstones of Care.

Our Share the Love monthly giving program makes it easy to become a sustaining donor through an automated monthly donation.

Go to cornerstonesofcare.org/monthlygiving and sign up for monthly giving today.



Gift In-Kind Opportunities

Positive reinforcement motivates positive behavior, resulting in better behavioral decisions. We reward good behavior at our Gillis and Ozanam Campus day treatment schools and residential facility with toys, treats, and art supplies. Kids can use their rewards for positive behavior to “purchase” some of their favorite things. Please help us keep a fun and exciting stock by donating any of the following reward favorites:

- Lego Sets
- Pokémon Cards
- Fidget Toys/Stress Balls
- Card Games
- Water Bottles
- Watches
- Coloring/Puzzle Books
- Minecraft Toys
- Basketballs
- Baby/Barbie Dolls
- Sports team hats or shirts
- Footballs and soccer balls
- Books/Journals
- Art and Craft Supplies
- Headphones and Ear Buds with Cords



Thank You, Ticket to Dream Foundation!



Pictured are items that were donated during Black History Month by Ticket to Dream. They also sent African American Barbie and baby dolls.

For over eight years, the Ticket to Dream Foundation has been an incredible partner for our foster youths. They are dedicated to creating hope and opportunities for children in foster care nationwide, allowing them to simply enjoy being kids. From supporting LGBTQIA+ needs to providing first night supplies, their generosity knows no bounds. They have supported kids' academic success by donating school supplies and laptops. Ticket to Dream's support extends to our holiday store where they provide makeup and toys, making the season brighter for our youth. We are especially grateful for their annual shopping spree with Famous Footwear in St. Louis. Words cannot express our gratitude for their unwavering support!

UPCOMING EVENTS

	April 26-27	Thyme For Kids Plant Sale Stock up on plants for your home and garden.
	May 9	Tee It Up Fore The Kids Gather your friends and family for an evening of golf.
	August 9	Bright Lights, Waldo Nights Grab your freshest '80s outfit and dance the night away.
	September 21	Disc Golf Tournament Come out with friends for a morning of sun and frisbees.

Family Preservation Services Helps Stabilize Single Parent Family

This December, the Kansas Department for Children and Families renewed its four-year contract with Cornerstones of Care to continue providing Family Preservation Services (FPS) to Kansas families. Read more to learn about one of the families served by this program.



Megan Pelton, a Tier 2 Family Preservation Case Manager, had been providing services for *Erin Warren and her three children for three months when she received a phone call that no case manager ever wants to receive.

“I got a phone call saying that the family couldn't stay in the homeless shelter any longer,” said Megan.

The journey to the shelter was not an easy one. Just a few months earlier, Erin and her three children were evicted from their home due to an inability to pay rent. Erin's partner unexpectedly left the family, leaving Erin with no way to earn income. They found refuge at Erin's father's house until he threatened violence against *Sonora, the youngest child, and they were moved to the shelter.

“I was angry and upset, and I wasn't sure where to go from there,” said Megan. “How do we get this family safe and stable if nobody is willing to take them in or help them?”

Family Preservation Services works to prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their homes while keeping them safe and stabilizing the family unit. The approach empowers parents to create a safe home for their children by building on their strengths and teaching them skills to manage future challenges.

As a case manager, Megan spends significant time coordinating services for families, such as assisting the Warren family with transportation and transitioning them to a hotel after being removed from the shelter. Megan also helped Sonora get help following several uncontrollable outbursts and violent episodes, including those that led to their removal from the shelter.

“I truly believe her behaviors were related to the instability they were experiencing,” said Megan. “This is why we want them to have that strong support system because we're not going to be in the home forever.”

The biggest challenge was helping the Warren family find an affordable apartment to call home.

“Everywhere we turned, there was a waitlist a mile long,” said Megan. Other barriers she faced included meeting timelines and requirements for paperwork and managing various mental health crises along the way.

Two and a half months after the Warren family was evicted from their home, Megan received a phone call that changed everything: the family was accepted into a section eight housing apartment.

“It was a great moment,” said Megan. “Not only did they get the apartment, but the rent was very low. It was such a relief that they could finally get stability.”

Serendipitously, the phone call came just two weeks before their six-month treatment contract ended. Soon after moving in, Erin started a full-time home healthcare job and began mental health treatment to process the domestic violence as well as the physical and psychological abuse she suffered as a child.

“I love my families and the energy I feel when I know I can help a family succeed at something,” said Megan. “I can honestly say that in my eight years of child welfare experience, I have never had such a sweet success story as Erin Warren.” *

*names changed to protect privacy

Governing Board of Directors 2024

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BIST Book Now on Sale

BIST Director Marty Huitt can now add “published author” to her list of professional credits with a new book outlining more than 40 years of education techniques to address behavioral issues in K-12 students.

The book *Cultivating Behavioral Change in K-12 Students: Team-Based Intervention and Support Strategies* equips principals, teachers, mental health practitioners, and caregivers with tangible tools to manage students’ “out-of-bounds behaviors” and collaborate with students and other adults to create lasting change. The book went on sale on February 9 and is available through academic publisher Routledge and Amazon.

BIST, which stands for Behavioral Intervention Support Team, is used in more than 300 schools in nine states. Last year, an estimated 1,252 teachers and administrators were trained in the BIST model. The process was developed in the early 1980s at Cornerstones of Care’s residential schools. Since then, the training has gained popularity in school districts, and BIST In-Home services were developed a few years ago to provide the same techniques to families.

As in the training, the book focuses on helping students build the proper skills to reduce behavioral issues. That skill-building is built on the two key principles of BIST: grace and accountability.

“We’ve seen BIST change the culture of schools,” said Marty. “We are able to give adults the tools they need to change behavior and the terminology needed for teachers and administrators to help students progress year after year.” *

Honor & Memorial Gifts Celebrate Loved Ones

Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, or Memorial Day can be the perfect time to celebrate the important people who have impacted your life. By making a donation in their honor or memory, you can recognize them – while positively impacting the lives of thousands of children and families!

Honor and memorial gifts are directed to our Cornerstones of Care Foundation, which exists to support our mission for years to come. You can even designate Cornerstones of Care as the official beneficiary of group honorariums or memorials, often in lieu of flowers or presents. Your event or loved one will be celebrated by bringing hope, healing, and happiness to those we serve – a truly priceless gift.

How To Make A Tribute Gift:

ONLINE: Click the “Donate” button on our website. Be sure to complete the “Tribute” section within the online form. Then include whether you’d like us to send a special card to notify a friend or family member about your gift. We can also acknowledge you and your honoree in our list of tributes online.

MAIL: Include a note with your check to designate your gift in honor or memory of a person or event. Add your contact information, as well as the name and address of anyone who should be notified about your gift. Then send your check and letter to our Development Department at 8150 Wornall Road, Kansas City, MO 64114.

We’re here to help! For questions, contact Laurie Minx at 816-508-3608 or laurie.minx@cornerstonesofcare.org. *



Building Bridges: Funder Support Enables Expansion of Wrap-Around Services for Build Trybe Youth

Spring is in the air as Build Trybe youth prepare for the annual Thyme for Kids Plant Sale, and those in the Conservation Landscaping program get their hands dirty by learning hands-on skills to better the future of our environment.

Conservation Landscaping is one of three focus areas for Build Trybe, created through a collaborative effort between Heartland Conservation Alliance and Cornerstones of Care. The program equips youth, often facing homelessness or in foster care, with landscaping and horticulture skills and vocational mentorship for future employment.

Generous funding from the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has propelled the program’s growth in recent years.

MDC’s contributions have led to the creation of robust wrap-around services aimed at helping youth overcome barriers that hinder success in the program. Build Trybe recently purchased two trucks used to help transport youth to and from work sites, removing one significant barrier to access.

The hiring of new team members, including Transition Support Specialist Christa McLaughlin and Youth Success Coordinator Janet Thomason, enriches the support

services offered to participants. Experienced instructors Lindsey Weiss and Eva Williamson, Milieu Service Provider, equip youth with 180 hours of immersive training, preparing students to install and maintain nature-based infrastructure and other solutions.

Starting in late 2024, a grant from the EPA will further these efforts by providing resources to recruit, train, and place workers in the EPA’s Brownfields Jobs program.

The Thyme for Kids Plant Sale, a highlight of the growing season, offers Conservation Landscaping participants a unique opportunity to partner with peers at the Ozanam Campus to plant, grow, and sell a wide variety of plants.

Expressive Therapist Megan Sperry leads the planning and execution of the Plant Sale.

“It’s so important for these kids to see people come in and buy their plants,” said Megan. “It’s a lot of work, and they are excited to share what they’ve grown with the community.”

The Plant Sale is open to shoppers on April 26 and 27 at the Ozanam Campus greenhouse. Proceeds from the event will go to Build Trybe Seed to Plate and horticulture programming at the Ozanam Campus, further nurturing the growth of tomorrow’s environmental stewards. *



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- Youth & family support
- Foster care & adoption
- Education & training

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We'd like to thank the following funders without whom our work could not be done:

- Children Services Fund of Jackson Co.
- St. Louis County Children's Service Fund
- Jackson Co. Community-Backed Anti-Drug Tax (COMBAT)
- Jackson Co. Community Mental Health Fund
- Mo. Dept. of Economic Development: Neighborhood Assistance Program
- Mo. Dept. of Economic Development: Youth Opportunities Program
- Children's Trust Fund of Missouri
- Children's Services Fund of Clay County
- United Way of Greater Kansas City

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TEE IT UP FORE THE KIDS

AT TOPGOLF OVERLAND PARK



The weather is getting warmer, and what better way to celebrate the season than by joining us at Tee It Up Fore the Kids? This exciting event is happening on Thursday, May 9, from 5-8 p.m. at Topgolf in Overland Park, and it's all about enjoying a wonderful evening while supporting Cornerstones of Care.

We invite everyone to come and enjoy, regardless of your golfing skills. Imagine spending a fun evening at Topgolf, where every swing, laugh, and moment shared with friends contributes to the vital work of Cornerstones of Care. It's an opportunity to mix fun and philanthropy, and everyone's invited to be part of this special occasion.

Expect an evening packed with golfing fun, mouth-watering food, and the best of company. Reserve a bay for your group and make memories that last, all while knowing you're supporting the children and families in our community. Sponsorship opportunities are also available, offering a fantastic way to showcase your support while enjoying a memorable night out.

JOIN THE PAR-TEE AND SWING FOR A CAUSE!