

# Report highlights Kansas’ progress in child welfare

Most Kansas foster children are in stable placements and having their mental and behavioral health needs met, according to the Neutral Third Party in the McIntyre class action lawsuit settlement.

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), the independent Neutral Third Party in the lawsuit, today released its fourth report assessing the State of Kansas’ progress toward achieving performance requirements and improvement goals in the settlement agreement. This report covers data from calendar year (CY) 2024 and acknowledges the State is making progress and is committed to improving outcomes for Kansas children. It also shows areas in which improvement is needed.

The McIntyre et al. vs. Howard et al. class action lawsuit was filed in 2018 under the Colyer Administration by Kansas Appleseed, Children’s Rights, and the National Center for Youth Law against the Governor, Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF), Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services, and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. The Governor was later dismissed from the case.

A settlement was reached in 2020 and was structured to ensure Kansas would achieve substantial progress and compliance in key performance areas over a multi-year period. Performance areas include accountability, reporting and implementation, practice improvements, and outcomes. The settlement recognizes that the outcomes and practice improvements will not all be accomplished in one year. Outcome goals were set for a three-to-four-year period. To successfully complete an outcome, DCF must meet the outcome one year and then meet it a second year.

Significant progress underway

The 2024 report shows DCF and its partners have met eight of the obligations agreed to under the settlement agreement. The eight include maintaining the four previously met obligations under Accountability and Reporting Implementation. The following obligations were newly met in 2024:

- Placement stability – During a 12-month period 90 percent of children and youth were in a stable placement.
- 2024 outcome: 92 percent
- Initial mental health and trauma screens – During 12-month period, 90 percent of children and youth entering DCF custody shall have received a timely initial mental health and trauma screen conducted by a trained and qualified mental health professional within 30 days upon entry into the foster care system.
- 2024 outcome: 94 percent
- Licensed capacity – Placements shall not exceed its licensed capacity without an approved exception.
- 2024 outcome: Met

commitment in 2023 and maintained in 2024. DCF will exit out of the commitment for 2025.

- Crisis intervention services – Ensure crisis intervention services are available statewide.
- 2024 outcome: This commitment is supported by the establishment of the DCF Family Mobile Crisis Helpline and 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

DCF also saw performance increases or maintained progress on five obligations.

- Addressing mental and behavioral health needs – During a 12-month period, those in custody shall have had their mental and behavioral health needs addressed.
- 2024 outcome: 66 percent of the youth with an identified mental or behavioral health need received services that were tailored to the specific needs of the youth, culturally appropriate, accessible without waitlists, provided in a setting that is the most effective and responsive to needs; and monitored and adjusted, as needed, to ensure that treatment goals were being achieved and progress is made.
- Provision of mental health treatment without regard to placement stability – Authorization of medically necessary mental health treatment services shall not be delayed until placement stability is achieved or otherwise link access to medically necessary mental health treatment services with placement stability.
- 2024 outcome: Decreased the number of youth experiencing delays in mental health services due to placement instability to 11 percent, down from 20 percent in 2023.
- Placement moves – Outcome goal is for 90 percent of children and youth to have one or fewer placement moves in a 12-month period.
- 2024 outcome: Maintained progress from previous year of 83 percent.
- Placement moves per 1,000 days – All in custody during a 12-month period shall have a rate of placement moves that does not exceed the specified number of moves per 1,000 days in care. Goal is 4.44.
- 2024 outcome: Performance rate is 7.24, down from 7.94 in 2023.
- Night-to-night and short-term placements – DCF shall end the practice of night-to-night placements by end of 2021 and end short term placements by end of 2023.
- 2024 outcome: There were slightly fewer night-to-night and short-term placements during 2024 than previous reporting period.

To continue making progress with the Settlement obligations, DCF meets monthly with case management providers (CMP), child placing agencies and congregate care facility operators. The group collaboratively reviews settlement metrics, plans for improvements, and discusses strategies for practice improvements. The group is currently focused on ending the practice of overnight placements and creating strategies to reduce and eliminate short-term and night-to-night placements.

“We, along with our partners, have worked diligently to meet eight of the obligations agreed to under the settlement agreement and I’m proud of what we have accomplished and how we are improving the experience for young people in Kansas foster care. But there’s more to do. We remain committed to maintaining these results and pressing forward to fulfill the remaining commitments,” DCF Secretary Laura Howard said.

While details of mediation are confidential per the agreement of all parties, DCF can confirm it has participated in mediation with the neutral and plaintiff.

“We regularly meet with the parties to share data, answer questions and receive feedback,” Howard said. “These regular meetings have been beneficial to us, and we hope to the plaintiffs as well.”

Continue pushing forward

While great progress has been made, DCF continues pushing forward to address remaining obligations. The report shows one area with a decrease in performance – ending the practice of temporary housing or failure to place (FTP). In 2024, the rate of FTP increased, with a disproportionately higher number of FTP episodes in DCF’s Wichita Region, or area 7. This area experienced 83 percent of all FTP episodes in 2024.

Area 7 saw a change in CMP on July 1, 2024, when EmberHope replaced Saint Francis Ministries. Early in the CMP transition, many episodes of FTP were young people who refused the provided placement and at times any placement option. As a result, and with DCF’s support, EmberHope and other CMP agencies transitioned to using the Placement Stability Team Decision Making Meetings (PS-TDM) to support discussion and decision making about placements, including what services, actions or resources can be put in place to support stability and timely permanency for the young person. During these facilitated meetings, young people and their families have an opportunity to discuss the cause and potential solutions to episodes of failure to place.

To ultimately end FTP, DCF continues focusing on the cohort of youth experiencing extreme instability by identifying ways to get them the individual services they need to find stability and have a positive transition into adulthood.

DCF and EmberHope are working closely to assist with the needs in Sedgwick County and are focused on expanding capacity and support. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Expanded support through the Behavioral Intervention teams.
- A partnership between EmberHope and Mental Health America for a therapeutic day services model.
- Supporting EmberHope with engagement between child placing agencies (CPA) and congregate care facilities, rewarding youth for prosocial behaviors and employing mentoring programs, providing staff with training and supports, and launching of the Steps 2 Success program. Steps 2 Success is a congregate care facility run by EmberHope Youthville.
- DCF Therapeutic Family Foster Homes (TFFH) grants support increased recruitment and training. There are now 108 TFFH available statewide, with

about half of those located in Sedgwick County. DCF continues to support and work with TFFH sponsoring agencies to increase matching of high needs youth.

- DCF is working with their contracted CPAs and congregate care providers to transition young people who have achieved stability out of congregate care settings, making those already staffed beds available to young people who are experiencing episodes of FTP.

While the overall need for foster care has decreased by 26 percent in Kansas since 2019, the need for foster care in Sedgwick County has increased over the past five years. In fact, one in four youth in the Kansas foster care system are from Sedgwick County.

DCF’s Wichita region has been working closely with community organizations in Sedgwick County to reduce the need for foster care and stabilize the current system of care in the county. Gathered Strong Sedgwick County, a continuum of care coalition for child and family well-being, is one result of those efforts. Launched in 2024, Gathered Strong currently has over 50 community partners representing human service organizations, elected officials, education, medical professionals, private foundations, and business leaders. Presently, the organization is leading a Youth Empowerment Action Team, Partners in Prevention Action Team and Care for Every Family an initiative to activate the faith community.

All of this work is focused on meeting youth and families where they are to prevent entry into foster care, stabilize the system, enhance progress toward permanency for youth and create supports to ensure young adults successfully transition out of the system of care.

DCF and EmberHope are also working on boosting reintegration by infusing in-home supports to 60 families. In home supports are generally available to families to prevent entering foster care. DCF, EmberHope and community prevention providers are preparing to offer these supports to wrap around families as their child returns home.

Beginning in October 2025, focused Family First or Family Preservation supports around parent skill building, substance use disorder and mental health supports will be provided.

Other strategies include:

- Concentrated prevention collaborative response by DCF and family preservation services (FPS) provider (October 2025). On assigned reports for families whose children are living with acute behavioral health needs, DCCCA will accom-

pany a DCF child protection specialist (CPS) to meet families on assigned reports to assess a child or youth in a psychiatric residential treatment facility (PRTF) or acute behavioral health facility whose family is described as needing services. Joint response by DCF and FPS can help a family identify relief, supports and resources to prevent the need for foster care.

- Kansas Children’s Service League (KCSL) Kinship Navigator program has begun talks with the DCF region to offer their kinship navigation services and be present in team decision making meetings or other early contacts that DCF has alongside families. KCSL would help to locate and support kinship caregivers for families that may be at risk of or experiencing police protective custody (PPC) foster care.

“This has been a tough journey in Sedgwick County and there are no easy fixes. I am heartened by the strong base of community partners that are coming together to study and analyze why we have so much need in this one area – and determine appropriate steps for improving outcomes,” Howard said.

Those interested in the full CY 24 report can access it via the Center for the Study of Social Policy website.

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Community Clean-Up

October 6, 2025

Alley Cleanup Tips

- You must have items out before 8:00 a.m. on October 5 (but please do not begin making your pickup piles before Oct. 3).
- Place items to be picked up where your normal trash is collected.
- All items should be placed approximately 3 feet away from all utilities.
- **Separate your items by type (see categories below).**
- We will be stopping at each residence for ONLY 15 minutes MAXIMUM
- We will NOT make any return trips.
- **To avoid wrongful pickup, please tag or remove your “treasures” from the collection area.**
- **Grass will NOT be picked up Monday, Oct. 6.**

If you have any questions concerning the Clean-Up, call the Ellis Public Works Department at 726-4741 or 726-1741.

Municipal Waste

Fabrics

Carpets & Pad

Foam Products

Upholstery & Plastic Chairs

Couches

Lamps

Furniture

Trees

NO LONGER THAN:  
4' in length & 6" in diameter!

Place in alley - will be removed as soon as possible at a later date

Construction & Demolition

Bricks & Masonry Materials

Any Wood Products-incl. Pallets

Wallcoverings

Drywall

Electric Wiring

Non-Asbestos Insulation

Roofing Materials

Plumbing Fixtures

(Stools, Sinks & Tubs)

Wire Fencing or Wire

Metals (WHITE GOODS)

Washers

Dryers

Refrigerators

Piping

Tin

Metal Buildings

Metal Doors

Metal Containers

Lawn Equipment

Lawn Chairs

Lawn Mowers

(w/gas & oil removed)

Swing Sets

Bicycles

Wagons

Bed Frames & springs

Open Barrels

Non-Collectable items\*

Explosives

Batteries

Thinners

Buildings

Flammable Materials

Asbestos Materials

Hot Tubs/other large items

Concrete or Rocks

Medical Waste (Needles, Syringes, etc.)

\*E-Waste can be taken directly to the Ellis County Transfer Station.

NOTATION: Household Hazardous Waste Station Open

M-F 8a-4:45p / Sat. 9a-3:45p

785-628-9460

Tires

Paints/Coatings

Strippers

Drain Openers

					8			
	5						2	
1	8	7						
4	1		8					5
					7	1		
2					4			3
						4	9	
				7				
8			5	6	1	2		

Answers on pg 4B