

Foster Care Month Highlights Need for More Foster Families

Currently, there are more than 7,500 children in foster care. Sadly, these children have been placed outside of their home by the court for safety reasons. As the number of children in foster care continues to rise, following the national trend, the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) is actively recruiting foster families in all parts of the state, to ensure children can remain in their home communities while the agency and its contractors work with birth families to address safety issues and promote reunification. "It has become abundantly clear that we need more foster families, especially those who are willing to accept older youth, sibling groups and children with special needs," said DCF Secretary Meier-Hummel. "We are actively working to strengthen the continuum of care." At this time, there are more than 2,600 foster homes in Kansas.

Ensuring appropriate accommodations for children in care has been and remains a top priority for Secretary Meier-Hummel. However, some solutions to address the shortage of homes and facilities require additional funding. Governor Jeff Colyer, in January, proposed a DCF budget enhancement of \$16.5 million to address this and other urgent issues to help Kansas families in crisis. "I remain hopeful that the Kansas Legislature will respond to these needs by fully funding this request," said Governor Colyer. "As a State, we have a duty to care for children deemed unsafe in their own homes. Without adequate resources, we jeopardize our ability to address the problems facing the child welfare system." With the current resources, Secretary Meier-Hummel continues to seek solutions to the placement option shortage. In recent months, she has worked diligently with DCF staff and others to address the immediate issue of placing youth, to prevent overnight stays in contractor offices. She is also directing staff to quickly eliminate identified barriers in the placement process. Kinship care approvals are being expedited. Reviews and investigations of foster homes are being moved through. And provider agreements are being fast tracked to increase bed availability. These steps are being taken all while ensuring child safety is not compromised.

While it's important to focus on the immediate need for placement options, it's also important to relay our appreciation for the foster and kinship families who are taking on the tremendous responsibility of caring for youth removed from their homes. Governor Colyer has signed a proclamation designating May as Foster Care Month. At 5:30 p.m., on May 12, DCF will host a foster family appreciation night at the Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center. The event will kick off with a news conference, to include Lieutenant Governor Tracey Mann, Secretary Meier-Hummel, foster families and others. Foster care information will be available at more than a dozen booths, and family-friendly activities will be available throughout the zoo grounds. Additionally, throughout the month of May, foster care contractors, KVC Kansas and Saint Francis Community Services, will host other appreciation events for families.

For more information about foster care in Kansas, visit www.FosterKSKids.org or call 1-844-380-2009