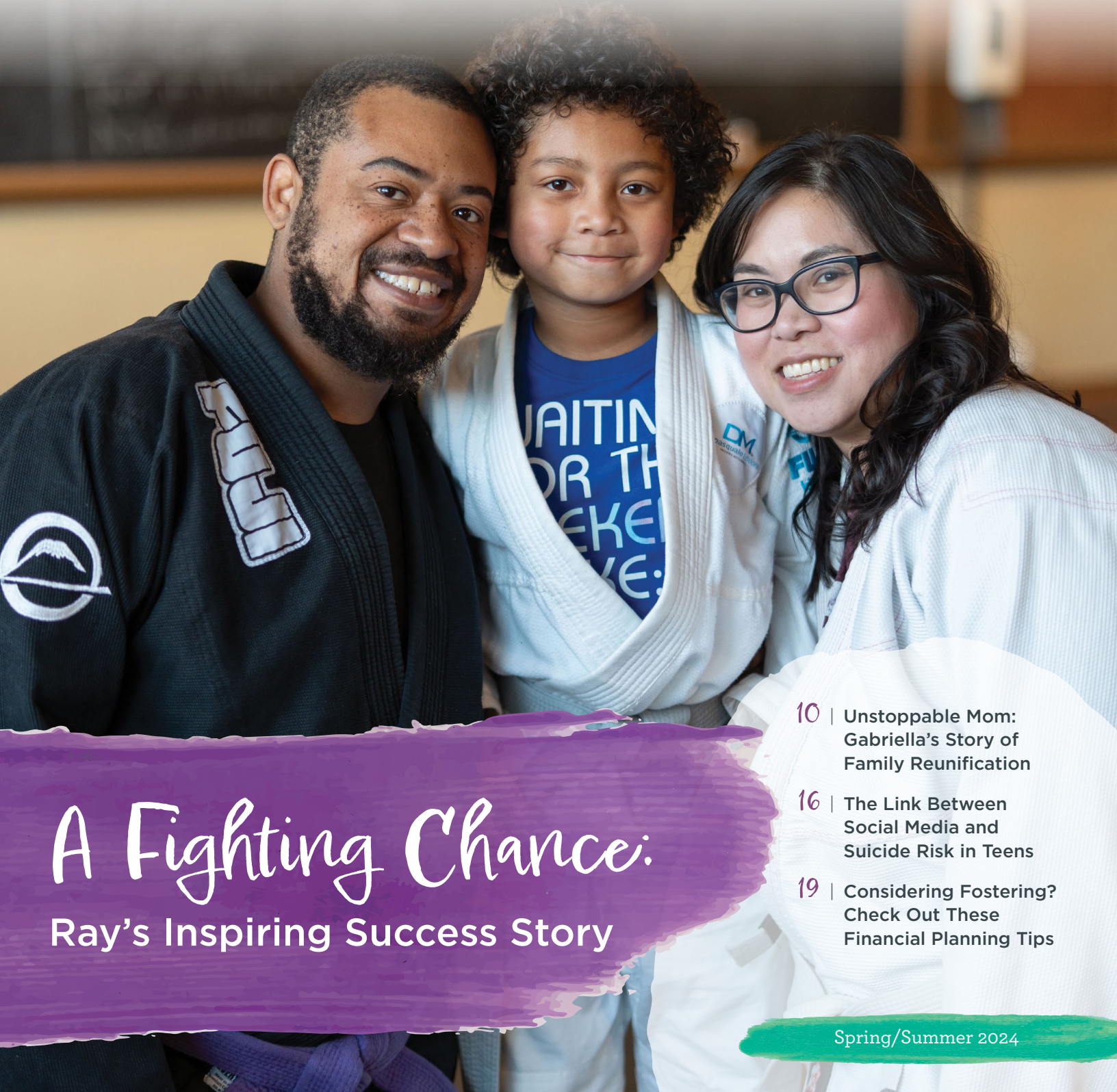


thriving

Stories about creating happy childhoods, strong families & healthy communities.



A Fighting Chance:
Ray's Inspiring Success Story

- 10 | Unstoppable Mom: Gabriella's Story of Family Reunification
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Want More in Life?

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of parenthood and help children

Over 400,000 U.S. children
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Learn more at: kvc.org/foster

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

Dear Friends,

Whether you're a kid, a young person, or an adult, some words will always speak straight to your heart. When someone says, "I believe in you," "Tell me more about your hopes, dreams, and what matters most to you," or "I will always love you no matter what," we feel seen and cared for. These affirmations remind us we are valuable, we belong, and the future is full of possibility.

It's these kinds of real conversations that are a sign of a healthy relationship. And nothing could be more important than relationships to the work KVC does in children's mental health and child welfare each day. Developmental research shows that having one or more caring adults in a child's life increases their resiliency to challenging situations long into the future and enables them to become healthy adults.

Just think of your own life. Where would you be without immediate or extended family members who supported you as you grew up? What might have happened if it weren't for the

caring friends, teachers, neighbors, and coaches you've had along the way? And to turn the tables — who are the people who now depend on **you** for a phone call, a funny text, a meal out, or the celebration of milestones? Relationships are everything.

In this issue of *Thriving*, you'll read stories that spotlight the grounding, healing power of relationships in our lives:

- In **Ray's Journey: From Foster Care to Father, Jiu-jitsu Club Founder, and Mentor** (pg. 6), you'll read the inspiring story of a young man who experienced heartbreaking childhood adversity. Yet due to a KVC case manager who believed in him and the friendships he made in martial arts, he became a husband, a father, a nonprofit leader, and a mentor to dozens of young people.
- In **Unstoppable Mom Reunites with Her Son** (pg. 10), you'll meet an incredible woman who bravely ended the cycle of childhood trauma in her family, linking arms with her KVC caseworkers to bring her son safely home.
- And in **A Day in the Life of a Mental Health Nurse** (pg. 12), you'll learn how our Camber Children's Mental Health nurses use their medical expertise along with the simple power of paying attention to extend love and care to young people in crisis.

Stories like these happen every day, thanks to people like you who believe in and support KVC's mission. Thank you for helping to improve people's lives every day.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Hooper".

Jason Hooper
President and CEO





KVC West Virginia, Big Brothers Big Sisters Partner to Connect Youth in Foster Care with Mentors

KVC West Virginia and Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Tri-State announce a new, innovative partnership to connect children and teens in foster care with dedicated mentors, expanding their support networks and fostering a stronger sense of belonging. See details on pg. 22.

Spring/Summer 2024

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Cover Story

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As a child, Ray experienced abuse and neglect. He shares his story of foster care and resilience, and how he's now transforming the lives of children just like him.



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Gabriella's story is an embodiment of resilience, redemption and healing. Read how she overcame adversity to reunify with her son after foster care and now dedicates her life to empowering parents and families involved with child welfare through advocacy, mentorship and leadership.



18 From Crisis to Connection: Family Strengthening and Prevention Services at KVC

At KVC, we know it's best for children's wellbeing to remain connected with their biological family whenever it's safely possible. Although foster care is sometimes necessary, providing support through our prevention and family preservation services helps families stay together or reunite.



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Meet Children Who Need a Forever Family: Daisie, Eric, Jacob and Nicholas are each waiting for a loving adoptive family. Learn more about these youth, including their unique personalities, strengths and interests.



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Discover useful financial planning tips and advice for managing your finances when starting out on your foster parent journey.



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A Fighting Chance:

How Ray Overcame a Difficult Childhood to Become a Family Man, Nonprofit Founder, and Mentor

At KVC, we know *we all need connection*. And as a preteen, new to foster care, that was exactly what Ray Freeman craved. “From my perspective, as a 12-year-old boy, I had no idea what was happening,” Ray said. But with support from a KVC case manager, Ray experienced an incredible journey to build a life of impact.

Now in his 30s, Ray has established a nonprofit jiu-jitsu program in the very community where he grew up. He’s aiming to build just the kind of connections he wished he had as a young person, to make a ripple effect on the Kansas City community at large.

The Turning Point

At twelve years old, a big change occurred in Ray’s life that would forever alter his path forward. This change was the moment that Child Protective Services (CPS) stepped in and connected Ray and his siblings (three younger sisters) to KVC. “My birth mother was a single mother who was loving and caring but lost her parental rights due to her partying ways,” Ray recalls. “There would be times when she would physically discipline us, and it would be intense. At times, we were living with roaches and rats. Only now, as an adult, I have realized that things like that aren’t normal.” His father had never been in the picture.

continued on page 8

A Fighting Chance

continued from page 7

“One night, mom came home after a night of partying, and beat me and my sisters,” Ray says. The following day at school, a teacher noticed welts on his sister’s body, and that’s when CPS got involved. As a young boy, Ray remembers feeling uncertain about what the future would look like. “I didn’t even know what foster care was,” he says. “In fact, I often thought I was in trouble. It was very much a whirlwind, and I’m sure my sisters would say the same thing.”

Looking Back: The Foster Care Years

Ray spent some of his most formative years in foster care, from age 12 to 18. “These were six very impressionable years, trying to figure out who I am as a person, needing guidance and things like that,” Ray says, and he actively tried to discern his identity and how he could grow into the kind of man he wanted to become.

Throughout this time, Ray moved homes a few different times. Sometimes the move was so the siblings could live together in a new home or because a relative stepped forward to provide care. Other times, a move happened because a family decided to discontinue providing foster care.

Another part of his journey was presented to Ray when, at 14, he was diagnosed with Crohn’s disease. This inflammatory disease of the digestive tract can have life-threatening complications and, for a 14-year-old navigating teenage years while in foster care, it was a lot to handle. “This diagnosis of Crohn’s disease added an extra layer of stress, especially when life didn’t really have a bright outlook in the first place,” Ray reflects.

But today, Ray reflects on how his tumultuous childhood made him into the person he is today. As an adult, Ray felt eager to take on the world. He enrolled in college at Kansas State University. “And that’s where my adulthood really begins,” Ray says.

KVC’s Impact on Ray’s Life

KVC positively impacts the communities we serve by removing obstacles to treatment and care for children and families in need and providing the necessary support for children and families to develop healthy lives. Case managers, therapists,

social workers, and other providers all work together to ensure the youth clients in their care are safe — and many of these providers leave a lasting impact on the people they serve.

Ray recalls one KVC team member in particular who made a transformational mark on his life: his case manager, Maureen. Maureen’s dedication to Ray and his siblings was truly remarkable. “She made sure my needs were taken care of and pointed me in the right direction,” Ray says.

“She genuinely wanted to see me do well,” Ray said.

“It was a powerful experience to have someone root for me, especially when I didn’t have a whole lot of people rooting for me.”

The Game Changer

As a young adult looking for confidence, Ray’s world changed yet again after taking his first steps into a Brazilian jiu-jitsu school. “To build your character, you have to first break everything down that you’ve ever done. It humbles you. It’s a reality check.”

As Ray realized he had found something that had been missing from his life, his martial arts practice grew from a hobby into a passion. While he valued jiu-jitsu as a workout, Ray also gained a sense of empowerment, good mental health, and community. Jiu-jitsu also connected Ray to friends who invested in him and helped him grow.

“It’s just really beautiful,” he says of his jiu-jitsu practice. “I’m not sure how I’d be making it in life or where I’d be without it.” Because of his experience, Ray actively advocates for children, especially those connected to KVC, to get involved with jiu-jitsu.



In capturing this story, we were able to reunite Ray and Maureen, his KVC case manager. Watch his video to hear from them both.

Transforming Lives Through Jiu-jitsu

Today, Ray spends his time with his wife and son while also leading his nonprofit organization, One Community JiuJitsu. He intentionally opened his martial arts studio in Wyandotte County in Kansas City, KS, where Ray was born and raised, and where no other facility like this exists. Ray’s facility minimizes financial barriers to serve those who wouldn’t otherwise experience jiu-jitsu. “My goal is to create as few hurdles as possible, so that youth can have access to this,” Ray says.

Ray has big goals for his studio and the community. His mission is to not only give people a way to connect to themselves and those around them but to also help lower violence in the area, improve youth mental health, and become a leader and inspiration to others.

In Ray’s words, “We are a very small nonprofit, but I have very big dreams.” Since opening in early 2020, he’s achieving his goals. As Ray’s KVC case worker puts it, “He’s broken the cycle.”

Get to know Ray, his family, and his case manager, Maureen, by watching their video at kvckansas.org/ray.

“To build your character, you have to first break everything down that you’ve ever done. It humbles you. It’s a reality check.”



Unstoppable Mom

Does Whatever It Takes to Reunify with Her Son After Foster Care



“When it comes to my family, I’m unstoppable.”

Gabriella says. And her story illustrates exactly that.

Gabriella’s early years were marked by turmoil at home, eventually leading to foster care. Throughout her life, she faced a series of hardships, including domestic abuse and substance misuse. Despite these challenges, she found immense joy in motherhood. Unfortunately, a night intended for relaxation turned into a nightmare, resulting in her son’s placement in foster care.

Yet, these challenges paved the way for Gabriella’s journey towards resilience and healing. Today, she uses her experiences to advocate for others.

Searching for Stability and Belonging

Gabriella’s adolescence was marked by conflicts with her mother and traumatic experiences that necessitated her being placed in foster care to keep her safe. The trauma and instability Gabriella was exposed to as a teen heavily impacted her. The lack of connection and support from her biological family exacerbated her

distress, leading her to drug misuse and dropping out of school when she was only 15.

Determined to take control, Gabriella married the young man she was living with and sought emancipation from her mother. However, stability was short-lived as she discovered her pregnancy and faced rejection from the family she was staying with.

A few months later, Gabriella gave birth to a beautiful boy. As she adjusted to life as a new mom, she was forced to endure physical abuse from her husband. When her son was seven months old, she bravely left her husband and filed for divorce. With no stable home, she found support among coworkers, determined to rebuild her life.

Coping with Heartbreak and Adversity

After working tirelessly to make ends meet, she welcomed the chance for a night out when a friend invited her to a concert. However, what was meant to be a brief respite spiraled into a nightmare when she accepted a blunt that was unknowingly laced with dangerous substances.

When she woke up the next morning, her world turned upside-down. Misjudged as a drug addict and a threat to her child, Gabriella found herself grappling with the abrupt removal of her son by Child Protective Services (CPS).

At first, Gabriella’s response was a hard fight, especially knowing that she wasn’t regularly using drugs at the time. But as time went on, she started to doubt herself and faced mental health struggles, including drug addiction.

“I spiraled after my son was taken, and it took a lot for me to forgive the system for what happened,” Gabriella remembers with sadness.

Recognizing Gabriella’s resilience, KVC worked tirelessly to help her safely reunite with her son. A KVC family support worker noticed the progress she was making and advocated for her, ultimately persuading the prosecutor at her parental rights termination hearing to reconsider.

Reunifying with Her Son

After more than two years of separation, Gabriella safely reunited with her then three-year-old son. However, their path to reunification was challenging and involved numerous case plans, drug tests, rehabilitation programs, mental healthcare and even probation.

Amidst this, Gabriella found solace in meeting the love of her life, Noah. “Noah is a godsend,” Gabriella says. “He put me on my feet and helped me get a leg up in the world.”

Today, Gabriella and Noah are married and have two sons together, Camden and Milo. Their family enjoys classes at the art center and keeps very busy with Camden’s theater and sports activities. Their latest achievement? Noah recently adopted Camden, legally signifying Noah as Camden’s father.

As Gabriella continues her journey towards healing, she’s realizing that her life experiences are a part of a bigger purpose.

Mission to Support Others

Now, Gabriella uses her experiences to empower other parents navigating foster care. She collaborates with the Annie E. Casey Foundation and SOUL Family, a new legal permanency initiative shaped by and for youth in foster care. She also works to improve families’ experiences with KVC Kansas services as a member of the Engaging Parents Workgroup and a parent mentor.

“If you have that strong love for your kid, you’re going to do what it takes,” Gabriella explains. “I used to be ashamed that my son had been in foster care. But today, I get to help others make changes in their lives.”

Read Gabriella’s full story and see a video at kvckansas.org/unstoppable.



Gabriella sharing her story during the Parent Panel Discussion at KVC’s 2023 Resource Family Conference.

A Day in the Life of a Mental Health Nurse



What does a day of work look like for a nurse in a children's mental health hospital? Camber Children's Mental Health, a nonprofit subsidiary of KVC Health Systems, is a network of three children's mental health hospitals and treatment centers and is opening a fourth hospital in partnership with Children's Mercy Kansas City later this year. We spoke with our caring nurses to get an inside look at their roles.

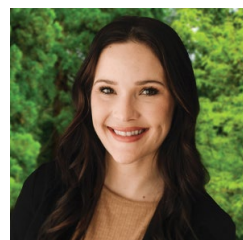
Being a nurse at a children's mental health hospital is all about extending love and care by meeting each child and young person's unique needs. Nurses provide 24/7 supervision of youth patients or clients and assess youth twice each day to monitor their mental and physical health symptoms. Often those symptoms are related to depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, hallucinations, self-harm thoughts and other mental and behavioral health concerns. Nurses also measure youth's vital signs and pass along pertinent information to the rest of the multi-functional Camber treatment team.

"At Camber, we focus on self-care and making sure we take care of our employees. We're always looking at new ways to be innovative as an employer, to make sure our team members are engaged and taken care of."

Daily work also includes a variety of other activities based on each youth's needs, such as administering medication, admitting new youth, and facilitating orders from doctors.

Beyond direct work with youth, nurses actively participate in meetings with other Camber team members involved in a child's treatment and collaborate with outpatient providers on each child's discharge planning to help them safely and successfully transition back home.

Regardless of a nurse's area of expertise, their work to help each young person be safe, comfortable, and on the path toward health and healing is inspiring. All nurses deserve to be celebrated. "It's very rewarding to be part of our team," says Taylor Ziegler, Vice President of Nursing. "At Camber, we focus on self-care and making sure we take care of our employees. We're always looking at new ways to be innovative as an employer, to make sure our team members are engaged and taken care of."



Camber offers opportunities for rewarding and life-changing work in the mental health field. If you live near one of our treatment centers in Kansas, there is no better time to join the Camber team than now. You can make a meaningful difference in the life of a child or teen who is struggling with scary and difficult days as they work to overcome challenges with their mental health.

KVC and Camber have nursing opportunities available for RNs and LPNs for full-time and part-time shifts.

Learn more about our positive culture and see open job opportunities at kvc.org/careers and cambermentalhealth.org/careers.

Meet Children Who Need a

Forever Family

We're honored to play a role in matching children with loving adoptive families in multiple states. Due to our role as a lead foster care agency in Kansas, we're able to share photos and videos of Kansas children like those below at adoption.kvc.org. To inquire, contact KVC Kansas' adoption team at 1-888-655-5500 or adoptionsspecialist@kvc.org. To see children near you who need adoptive families, visit AdoptUSKids.org.

ERIC (14)



Eric is a loving, compassionate soul who enjoys searching for treasures at yard sales and building with Legos. He loves going to car shows and even dreams of owning a car shop one day. Eric has a mellow personality and is looking for a patient and structured family.



DAISIE (12)



When Daisie's not on the playground or shooting hoops, you can find her singing, dancing or completing puzzles. Daisie thrives in a structured and supportive environment, and her excellent communication skills and honesty make her an ideal addition to a small, loving Kansas family.



JACOB (16)



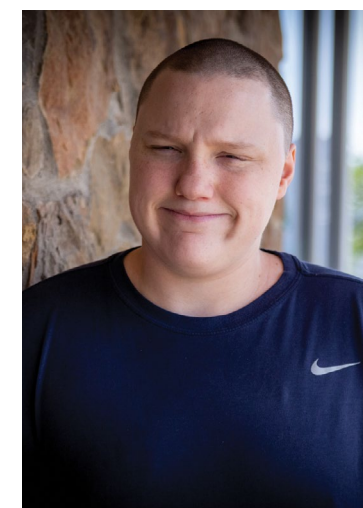
Jacob loves cooking, playing sports, hanging out with friends and dreams of becoming a professional chef. He's seeking a caring family in Kansas who will support his educational needs, maintain his relationships with siblings and other connections, and nurture his ambitions.



NICHOLAS (16)



Nicholas, with his observant and humorous personality, aspires to be a photographer one day. He enjoys activities like video games, football and camping. Nicholas desires a Kansas family who can provide consistent emotional support and patience.



Healing and Adventure at Meramec Adventure Ranch



In the middle of the woods, in the middle of Missouri. That's where some of the most remarkable healing work takes place for children who have experienced trauma. At Meramec Adventure Ranch, there are 1,200 acres of love and miracles.

KVC Missouri's nationally accredited Meramec Adventure Ranch in Steelville features one of the Midwest's largest adventure bases with ropes courses, aquatic activities, camping, kayaking, biking and several other incredible outdoor offerings.

If you ask Ranch Director Brett Bailey about all that, he'll quickly move you beyond the attractive amenities. "We use these not as an end in themselves, but as a catalyst to inspire growth, healing and hope," Bailey says. As a former Army Ranger, Bailey possesses a deep-seated understanding of the transformative power of outdoor experiences. Bailey views these activities as essential tools for inspiring confidence, self-belief and positive decision-making among the children who visit the Ranch.

"Along their journey, we help them reach several milestones — developing awareness, respect and interdependence; reconstructing perceptions of self; nurturing hope, transforming brokenness into meaningful purpose and direction; and experiencing joy in living."



Outdoor Adventure Therapy

The Ranch provides a unique type of therapy for the children who visit throughout the year. Bailey's leadership and efforts to weave adventure learning around an understanding of childhood trauma have turned the Ranch into something unique. Most of the children who come to the Ranch are currently receiving residential treatment or other services through KVC Missouri. The vast majority have experienced significant childhood trauma.

At the Ranch, young people gain opportunities to build confidence. They begin to believe in their abilities and skills to achieve goals and start to understand the importance of making positive life choices. These lessons shine through in moments when kids suddenly realize they can tackle a difficult course or complete a challenging activity.

A Trauma-Informed Perspective

Bailey began his Ranch career 15 years ago and has dedicated his life to helping kids in need. One of his first achievements for the Ranch was gaining accreditation by the American Camp Association and a host of other certifications. Most importantly, Bailey and his staff also have received extensive training in trauma-informed care.

"Our pledge is to meet kids where they are," Bailey says. "We redeem the brokenness in a child's past and build resiliency to future trauma by providing an environment where they can grow their personal efficacy, life-giving relationships with others, and purpose through service."

Adds Bailey, "Along their journey, we help them reach several milestones — developing awareness, respect and interdependence; reconstructing perceptions of self; nurturing hope, transforming brokenness into meaningful purpose and direction; and experiencing joy in living."

Summer 2024 Programs at the Ranch:

The Ranch is gearing up to offer an exciting range of programs designed to inspire growth and foster connection this summer.

Residential Programs:

- ▶ Weeklong therapeutic adventure camp programs full of fun, challenge, growth and healing
- ▶ Progressive skills camps that use the development of specific adventure skills as a catalyst to grow efficacy, connection and purpose
 - ▶ Activities include climbing/rappelling, Cowboy College culminating in a real-life cattle drive, kayaking, sailing, primitive skills and survival
- ▶ Adventure daytrips
- ▶ Swimming lessons

Programs Beyond Residential Treatment:

- ▶ Weeklong adventure camp for children on the autism spectrum, providing a safe and inclusive environment for exploration
- ▶ A camp for siblings currently living in different foster care homes, providing a chance to reunite and bond
- ▶ The Wounded Warrior Family Camp offers military families a healing retreat, fostering connections and relaxation
- ▶ A special camp for children of veterans in the Missouri Army National Guard

"I always look forward to that expression in a camper's eyes as he or she starts to realize their ability to accomplish things," Bailey says. "Maybe they've never been given credit for their hidden strengths or maybe they can't even give themselves credit for them."

After a Ranch experience, Bailey says kids begin to see they're not alone — and they can make an impact on the world.

"We see kids start thinking, 'I have something to offer. I'm not the sum of those negative words that cycle around in my head two minutes before I fail at something,'" Bailey says. "Watching that spark light up and get repeated throughout a camper's time here is amazing."

Learn more about the KVC Missouri Meramec Adventure Ranch: kvcmissouri.org/meramec.

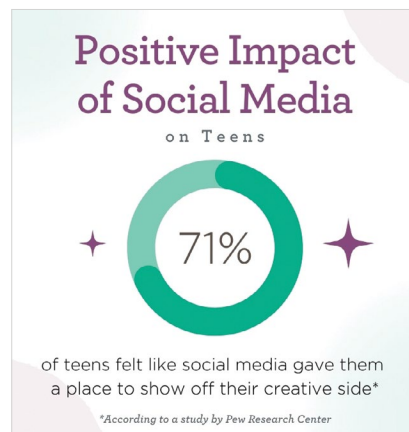
Social Media and Suicide Risk in Teens:

What Caregivers Need to Know

With technology thoroughly integrated into our everyday lives, social media has become a normal part of our daily routines. Social media has many positive aspects, but it has downsides too, especially for teens: social media can negatively impact mental health, self-esteem, and overall wellbeing.

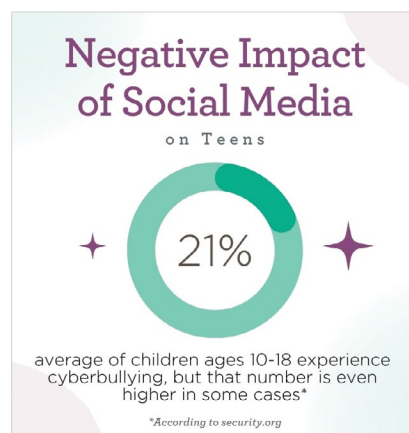
Positive Impact of Social Media on Teens

On the positive side, social media helps teens stay connected to friends and family while also providing a way to develop new friendships. For teens who struggle to find their community and feel accepted, social media provides pathways to engage with people with common interests. As teens discover themselves, including interests, passions and talents, social media provides a creative outlet and a way to explore.



Negative Impact of Social Media on Teens

Considering how hard it is for adults to log off, imagine how much more challenging it can be for teens, whose brains are still developing. The increasing rates of social media use raise concerns:



- Research shows that **close to 81% of teens in America use social media consistently** and 24% are constantly connected.

- **Most teens spend between 16 and 62 hours a week online.** This is time that was often spent resting, being outdoors, creating, or being with friends in the past.
- **More than half of teens say it would be difficult to give up social media,** with non-school-related screen time doubling from pre-pandemic estimates.

The amount of screen time isn't the only concerning thing; social media can also impact self-esteem. Viewing the carefully curated lives presented on social media encourages teens to compare themselves to an impossible standard, resulting in feelings of inadequacy.

And perhaps the most significant negative impact on teens using social media is the prevalence of cyberbullying. It's bullying amplified since social media reaches more people and can be much harder to control.

Warning Signs That Your Teen is Struggling

- **Drastic Change in Emotions:** Teenage mood swings are not unusual, but dramatic changes can be a warning sign, especially severe sadness, anger, fear, or embarrassment.
- **Withdrawing:** Spending more time alone, disengaging from activities they previously enjoyed or increased isolation.
- **Trouble in School:** Especially in cases of cyberbullying, teens may try to avoid school, have trouble concentrating and begin struggling with their grades.
- **Physical Effects:** Teens may show physical signs of upset including headaches, stomachaches and sleeping problems.
- **Psychological Effects:** As negative online behavior persists, symptoms such as anxiety, depression, or suicidal thoughts can occur, and immediate attention is needed.

With all the changes teenagers go through, it can be difficult to identify when your teen is experiencing some negative effects of social media.

For assistance with suicidal thoughts or thoughts of self-harm, call the suicide lifeline at 988 for 24/7 help.

Tips to Encourage Healthy Social Media Usage with Your Teens

- **Education and Awareness:** A great start is educating teenagers about the potential risks of social media use and screen time, such as cyberbullying, online harassment and unrealistic expectations.
- **Set Limits:** Encourage teens to have designated screen-free time to prevent social media from becoming all-consuming.
- **Encourage Offline Activities:** Promote a healthy balance between online and offline time by motivating teens to pursue hobbies, sports, or social activities.
- **Be a Role Model:** Show teenagers how to use social media responsibly and in moderation. Practice healthy social media habits yourself, such as not constantly checking your phone.

- **Encourage Open Communication:** Create a safe and non-judgmental environment where teenagers feel comfortable discussing their online experiences.
- **Teach Critical Thinking:** Help teenagers develop skills to distinguish between real and fake news and recognize scams and harmful content.
- **Promote Positivity and Kindness:** Motivate teens to use social media as a tool for spreading positivity and kindness. Words have power, and we can teach young people how their online behavior can impact others.
- **Monitor and Supervise:** Finally, while it's important to give teenagers some freedom, it is equally important to monitor their online activities. Keep an eye on their social media accounts, friend lists and the content they are watching, reading, and sharing.

Encouraging healthy social media habits is one major way that caregivers can support their teen's overall wellbeing and future success. By promoting these tips and staying ahead of the game, we can help teenagers responsibly navigate the digital world.

If you suspect social media is causing any of the negative effects listed above, learn more about our mental health services at kvc.org/mentalhealth.



From Crisis to Connection:

Family Strengthening and Prevention Services at KVC



KVC has a proven track record of keeping up to 98% of families safely together through in-home family strengthening services.

This safely prevents children from entering foster care and prevents child and adult mental health needs from becoming crises.

While foster care can be a crucial safety net for children and families in challenging circumstances, we at KVC know how important it is to help families stay together. Consistent caregiving and stable families are essential for children. That's why we offer foster care prevention and family preservation services to help families remain intact or safely reunite.

Evidence suggests that children thrive best in their natural environments, under the care of biological parents whenever safely possible. Removing children from biological families can lead to lifelong challenges, explains Chelsey Carron, Supervisor of Intensive In-Home Services in Missouri. "The trauma of removing children from a home is much more severe and can create a lasting impact that stays with them for the rest of their lives," she says.

Trauma often repeats itself through generations. But with learned coping and resiliency skills, necessary substance treatment, counseling or therapy, and other trauma-informed support, families can begin healing their generational trauma, break the cycle and stay together.

Family preservation services like in-home services assist families through moments of crisis and prevent any further disruptions. In family reunification services, our

team helps children who have been removed from their homes safely reunite with their biological families once the family is stable.

Through KVC, children and families have access to resources including:

- › Counseling
- › Mental and behavioral therapy
- › Parenting classes
- › Ensuring needs are met, including financial support, budget setting, transportation needs and work and employment support (like resume assistance, interview coaching and even aiding in appropriate work clothing)
- › Creating more physically safe environments (with support for cleanliness, mental and physical organization, eating habits and safety)

These resources are crucial to strengthening families and promoting children's wellbeing. Learn more about how KVC supports children and families through times of crisis at kvc.org/prevention.

Financial Planning Tips

for First-Time Foster Parents

As a first-time foster caregiver, you are embarking on a fulfilling and life-changing experience! While caring for the wellbeing of the children in your home takes center stage, it's equally important to establish a solid financial foundation. Explore helpful strategies and recommendations for financial planning for those beginning their foster care journey.

Financial Resources and Support Available for Foster Caregivers

The financial aspect of becoming a foster parent can seem daunting, especially when there are so many unknowns. Yes, it's true that in the first few weeks, caregivers are expected to financially provide for the children's needs with their personal money. However, caregivers are reimbursed for expenses related to the children in their care. Reimbursements are sent multiple times per month.

In addition to these monthly reimbursements, community resources are available too. KVC works actively to match the needs of children and families to the most appropriate resources. As a community resource, KVC receives donations for foster families to use. These may include school supplies, shoes or clothing and even personal hygiene items. There are even Swap and Shops in some areas, where caregivers can do a little shopping day for clothing for children in their care.

Prepare Financially for Your Foster Care Journey

Potential foster caregivers might worry that they don't have the finances or resources to become a foster family. It's important to know that finances shouldn't be a barrier to becoming a foster parent. Many financial planning strategies and resources are available to offset any financial costs involved with caregiving.



To minimize the financial stresses of becoming a foster parent, use the following advice to explore or prepare for your foster care journey.

- › **Understand Your Expenses:** Caregivers should cover their expenses with their income, but also consider how those expenses may change when children enter their home.
- › **Create a Comprehensive Budget:** Consider all your income sources and allocate funds for different categories, including housing, utilities, transportation, groceries, childcare and entertainment. Be sure to account for any additional costs associated with fostering and track your expenses to stay on top of your budget.
- › **Maximize Available Financial Support:** Educate yourself on the eligibility criteria and application process for aid programs. You can also explore tax credits and deductions that may be applicable in certain situations.
- › **Build an Emergency Fund:** Setting aside some extra money for any unforeseen expenses is wise. This fund can serve as a safety net during challenging times and help you avoid financial stress.

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People on the Move

PROMOTION



Brynn Fowler, LCSW, LCSW
Senior Director of Operations and Compliance
 Camber Children's Mental Health (Kansas City, KS)
 7 years with Camber

Brynn provides support and oversight of operations, compliance, and facilities management for Camber's hospitals and residential treatment programs in Kansas City, Wichita and Hays and new projects.

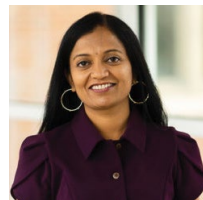
RECOGNITION/RELOCATION



Sarah Berens, LCSW
Executive Director
 Camber Kansas City (Kansas City, KS)
 7 years with Camber

Previously serving as Executive Director in Hays, Sarah has transferred to Kansas City to lead its team providing inpatient and residential services, ensuring children and families receive positive outcomes and compassionate care through enhanced collaboration, clinical practices and operations.

PROMOTION



Jyotsna Adma, M.D.
Medical Director of Psychiatry
 Camber Children's Mental Health (Kansas City, KS)
 17 years with Camber

Dr. Adma serves as Medical Director of Psychiatry Services for Camber's hospitals and residential treatment centers serving youth in Kansas City, Wichita and Hays. She is dual board-certified in General Adult Psychiatry and Child & Adolescent Psychiatry and specializes in mood and anxiety disorders.

PROMOTION



Kimberly Knapp, SHRM-CP
Human Resources Director
 KVC Missouri (Kansas City, MO)
 5 years with KVC

As HR Director, Kim oversees comprehensive human resources functions, orchestrating talent acquisition, employee development, and organizational initiatives to cultivate a thriving and inclusive work environment for the northern half of Missouri.

NEW HIRE



Julie Jurden
Vice President of Development
 KVC Foundation (Olathe, KS)

In her role of Vice President of Development, Julie advances the mission, vision and values of the KVC Foundation in partnership with its President and other organizational leaders.

NEW HIRE



Tina Hissong, MBA
Associate Vice President of Development
 KVC Foundation (St. Louis, MO)

Tina is responsible for coordinating and supporting regional initiatives to secure individual, corporate and community support for KVC programming, capital improvements and general needs.

NEW HIRE



Adam McBride
Senior Director Regional Advancement
 KVC Foundation (St. Louis, MO)

Adam is responsible for coordinating and supporting regional initiatives to secure individual, corporate and community support for KVC programming, capital improvements and general needs.

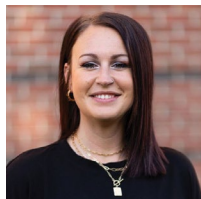
NEW HIRE



Joe Pallikathayil, MPA
Regional Director of Development
 KVC Foundation (Columbia, MO)

Joe is excited to reestablish a thriving Regional Council and build relationships that will help those KVC serves in his region to thrive.

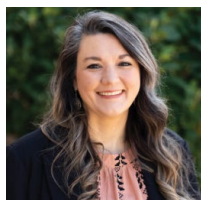
PROMOTION



Tamara Moore, MA, LPC
Regional Director of Child Placing
 KVC Missouri (Columbia, MO)
 7 years with KVC

Tamara oversees Child Placing for Treatment Foster Care and Licensing programs in Central, South Central, East and Southeast Missouri, ensuring that all program needs and responsibilities are met while helping with outreach to ensure program growth.

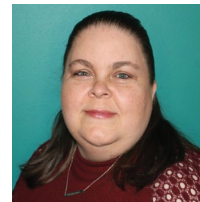
PROMOTION



Jessica Elliott, LMSW
Senior Director of Child Placing
 KVC Missouri (Kansas City, MO)
 14 years with KVC

Jessica serves as the Statewide Senior Director of Child Placing for KVC Missouri and oversees our child placing department statewide, which includes resource development, licensing and foster home support, as well as treatment foster care.

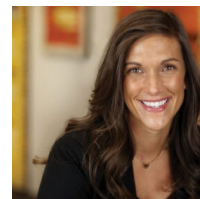
PROMOTION



Maggie Bell
Director of Operations
 KVC Missouri (Springfield, MO)
 10 years with KVC

Maggie serves as the Director of Operations for KVC Missouri and is driven by a genuine desire to contribute positively to the lives of children and teenagers, using her experience and clinical knowledge to create an environment conducive to healing, growth, and resilience.

NEW HIRE



Kelly English, LPC
Vice President of Clinical Services
 KVC Missouri (Kansas City, MO)

Kelly oversees clinical programming and implementation across all KVC Missouri programs, working closely with the admissions and utilization teams in Missouri.

NEW HIRE



Travis Cox
Director of Marketing and Communications
 KVC Missouri (St. Louis, MO)

Travis serves as the Director of Marketing and Communications for KVC Missouri, overseeing marketing efforts across the state while working collaboratively with all Missouri leaders to drive marketing initiatives and grow client bases.

PROMOTION



Amanda Moline
KSTEP Program Director
 KVC Kentucky (Frankfort, KY)
 2 years with KVC

Amanda provides overall direction and leadership to the KSTEP program in the Salt River Trail region including ensuring quality services to families, collaborating with community partners, and monitoring program outcomes.

PROMOTION



David Snyder
BHS/MST Program Director
 KVC Kentucky (Lexington, KY)
 14 years with KVC

David works to help coordinate all Medicaid services for KVC Kentucky as well as to monitor and coordinate the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grant and Multisystemic Therapy Services (MST) program.

KVC Events

OLATHE, KS

expected to open in late 2024



We're making progress on the construction of the new Children's Mercy Olathe + Camber Mental Health Wellness Campus for Youth and Adults, located right next to KVC's headquarters in Olathe, KS. In December, we celebrated the final steel beam being placed at our "Topping Out" Ceremony. This project is supported, in whole or in part, by federal award number SLFRP 1176, awarded to the State of Kansas by the U.S. Department of Treasury, as well as by the Sunderland Foundation and other generous donors.



WEBSTER GROVES, MO



We were excited to get to know the Webster Groves and St. Louis community better at our Open House in December! Community members were invited to tour our Webster Groves, MO campus, meet our staff and learn more about our services.

GALLUP IN OMAHA, NE



KVC's Engagement Champions team spent the day at Gallup to come together as a group for strategic planning, team building, and employee engagement development.

OLATHE, KS



KVC hosted a Strengths Training Workshop to help leaders and managers best leverage our team's strengths and create a supportive environment where everyone can do their best work.

KVC West Virginia, Big Brothers Big Sisters

Partner to Connect Youth in Foster Care with Mentors



“By joining forces with Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Tri-State, we are opening doors to transformative mentoring relationships that will shape children’s lives in profound ways.”

KVC West Virginia and Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Tri-State (BBBS) have partnered to connect youth in West Virginia foster care with dedicated adult mentors, also known as big brothers or sisters. Together, KVC West Virginia and BBBS will recruit adult mentors and increase the enrollment of children in foster care in BBBS mentoring programs. This partnership has the potential to positively impact the lives of nearly 2,000 youth in foster care across Cabell, Kanawha, Mason, Putnam and Wayne counties, with over a third of these youth falling within the critical age range of 13 to 17.

While the goal for teens in foster care is to be safely reunified with their families or be adopted, some youth do “age out.” These teens who emerge from foster care without a permanent family or support system are at increased risk of unemployment, homelessness and other challenges. They’re also less likely to graduate high school and pursue higher education. However, by connecting these youth with dedicated mentors and fostering supportive relationships, we aim to expand their support systems and nurture a stronger sense of belonging within their communities.

Whenever they need someone to call, their big brother or big sister will be there — whether it’s for help with a flat tire, advice on preparing for job interviews, tips for a first date and much more. With care, kindness and connection, these mentors will partner with foster parents and other adults in a child’s life to guide them through childhood and into adulthood.

“Through this partnership, we are creating a bridge of care and mentorship for children and adolescents who need it most,” KVC West Virginia President Brent Lemon said. “By joining forces with Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Tri-State, we are opening doors to transformative mentoring relationships that will shape children’s lives in profound ways.”



We also hope that being big brothers and sisters will inspire adults to learn more about becoming foster parents. Seeing the difference they can make in a child’s life firsthand might encourage them to open their hearts and homes to even more kids who need love and support.



Stephanie Collier, Executive Director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Tri-State, emphasizes, “This transformational partnership will increase access to mentoring services for some of the most vulnerable children in our community. *The impact will ripple far beyond individual relationships, fostering a more connected and caring society.*”

We’re grateful for the support of Aetna Better Health of West Virginia, whose funding has been essential in making this partnership possible. Their commitment, along with that of our community, underscores our shared mission of enriching and enhancing the lives of children in foster care.

Over 6,000 youth across West Virginia are experiencing foster care, and the need for foster parents is greater than ever — especially for those willing to care for teenagers and sibling groups. Many of these youth have experienced abuse, neglect, or other family challenges and have been removed from their homes by the courts for their safety.

Learn more about becoming a foster parent at kvcwv.org/foster.



Financial Planning Tips

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- » **Get Professional Advice:** Consider consulting with a financial advisor who specializes in working with foster families. They can assist you in creating a customized financial plan, help you navigate complex financial situations and provide guidance on budgeting, saving and investing.
- » **Use Community Resources:** Take advantage of local resources available to foster parents. Although KVC has helpful resources for foster families, there are other non-profit organizations, support groups and government agencies that help with childcare, clothing, school supplies and extracurricular activities.
- » **Prioritize Self-Care and Financial Wellness:** While focusing on the financial needs of the children, don’t forget to prioritize your financial wellbeing. Taking care of your financial future will ensure you can continue providing a stable environment for the children in your care.



Support Beyond the Financial

Although financial support is essential, other forms of support are just as vital. When looking beyond the financial aspect of caregiving, it’s important to establish a solid foundation with any family currently living in the home to ensure that each member is ready to provide care to another person.

Here at KVC, **we want to see foster parents succeed!** We’re here to help, getting creative in finding different ways to support families with involvement in extracurricular activities, opportunities in the community or other aspects of the foster care experience. You can feel confident becoming a foster caregiver by gaining as much knowledge as possible to ensure you’re prepared mentally, emotionally, and financially.

Curious if foster caregiving is right for you? Get in touch with KVC today to learn more about foster caregiving. Visit kvc.org/fosterparenting.



We all need connection.

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