

thriving

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

**We Were Scared, Overwhelmed
and In Crisis — But With KVC's Help,**

We Found Peace

- 
- 14 | KVC Couple Finds the Joy of Parenthood through Foster Care and Adoption
 - 16 | Partnership with St. Louis Children's Hospital Will Expand KVC Missouri's Children's Mental Wellness Campus
 - 20 | Children May Not Remember Trauma, But Their Bodies Do

Gratitude for David Ball of Balls Food Stores:

A Lifetime of Service



KVC wishes to recognize and thank David Ball, President and CEO of Balls Food Stores, who is concluding his term on the KVC Health Systems Board of Directors.

David Ball's service continues a powerful legacy — his mother, JoAnn Ball, was one of the founding mothers of KVC. He and the Ball family have remained devoted supporters of KVC through the Ball's Charity Golf Classic, capital campaign leadership and numerous other contributions that have helped transform thousands of lives. David is now a Director Emeritus.

"We are incredibly grateful to David for his exceptional service and heartfelt commitment," said Jason Hooper, President and CEO of KVC Health Systems. ***"His family's leadership over six decades not only created KVC but also expanded our reach and deepened our impact in the lives of children and families."***

The Ball family legacy throughout three generations and more than 100 years of their family grocery business is truly one of love. A full half-century before the concept of "corporate social responsibility" arose in the 1970s, the Ball family was already practicing it by simply living out their family values. The Ball family created the model that other businesses aspire to, succeeding not only in profit but more importantly, with people.

Support from community members and partners makes it possible for us to strengthen vulnerable families, prevent child abuse and neglect, and help both children and adults achieve mental wellness. We are on the frontlines of care — helping families and individuals in crisis, and bringing hope and help to children in need.

There are many ways for you to join us in this impactful work. Learn how you can make a unique contribution at kvc.org/involved

KVC Values Work Wellbeing

"It's rare to find a workplace where you feel valued not only for the work you do but as a person."

At KVC Health Systems, we strive to build a positive, supportive culture. According to our employees' reviews, **KVC ranks in the top 1% of employers nationwide with a high 82 Work Wellbeing score on Indeed, the world's #1 job site.**



Looking for a career where you can change lives? *Join our team!*

www.kvc.org/careers



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO



Dear Friends,

I want to share a bit about what family means to us at KVC. Families don't fit into just one shape or story. Some are formed through birth, others through foster care, kinship connections, adoption, or chosen bonds. Some families are led by single parents or grandparents, others by siblings, neighbors, or lifelong friends. What they all have in common is love, care, and the courage to keep showing up for each other.

At KVC, family connection drives our culture. This means meeting families where they are, honoring their strengths, and making space for the unique ways they grow, heal, and thrive together. We believe that every family deserves to feel seen, respected, and supported — no matter what their path looks like.

In this issue of *Thriving*, you'll read stories that celebrate the resilience and richness of family life.

- ▶ In **We Were Scared, Overwhelmed and In Crisis — But With KVC's Help, We Found Peace** (pg. 6), you'll meet Lauren, Richard and Gabriel, a family who discovered they don't have to face their challenges alone. KVC was there to provide a lifeline and put them on the path to hope and stability.
- ▶ **What to Expect as a New Foster Parent: 7 Tips to Help You Feel Confident and Prepared** (pg. 12) provides resources for those thinking about embarking on a foster care journey. Foster parents are absolutely essential in supporting children and families during difficult times.
- ▶ And in **Expanding Hearts and Home: The Easley Family's Story of Adoption and Parenthood** (pg. 14), you'll see that our team members truly live our values. Brett and Katie, both longtime KVC team members, grew their family by adopting eight children from foster care. At KVC, we were thrilled to support them throughout their journey!

We are committed to uplifting all kinds of families with compassion, resources and community. With your continued support, we'll keep working toward a world where every child is safe, every family is strong and every person belongs.

Sincerely

Jason Hooper
President and CEO





Children May Not Remember Trauma, But Their Bodies Do

The latest neuroscience tells us that trauma affects a child's developing brain and impacts their behavior, biological development and even later-life health.

See details on pg. 20

thriving

Health

10 The Power of Nutrition in Mental Wellness

What we eat can shape how we feel. Discover key nutrients and tips for mindful eating habits.



Strengthening Families

6 We Were Scared, Overwhelmed and In Crisis – But With KVC’s Help, We Found Peace

When Lauren and Richard welcomed their miracle baby, Gabriel, they never imagined the complex needs that he would have as he grew up. But those needs would lead them on a journey from crisis to hope as they discovered KVC’s support.

12 What to Expect as a New Foster Parent: 7 Tips to Help You Feel Confident and Prepared

It’s normal to experience challenges as a new foster parent, but with our support and these tips, you’ll feel confident and ready to make a difference.



18 Scarlett’s Reunification Story: A Journey of Love, Healing and Homecoming

Discover how Trent and Mindy’s foster parenting journey created lifelong bonds, showcasing the power of connection and safe reunification.



Fall/Winter 2025-26



Creating Families

14 Expanding Hearts and Home: The Easley Family’s Story of Adoption and Parenthood

Two KVC employees, Brett and Katie, discovered the joy of parenthood through foster parenting. They had always dreamed of having a family of their own – and through adoption from foster care, their home and hearts are now full.

17 Meet Children Who Need a Forever Family

Zayden, Zayonn, Brezhauna, Thomas, Lucy, Josiah & Skyla are waiting for a loving adoptive family. Learn more about these youth, including their unique personalities, strengths and interests.



News & Events



2 Gratitude for David Ball of Balls Food Stores: A Lifetime of Service

As David Ball concludes his term on the KVC Health Systems Board of Directors and becomes a Director Emeritus, we celebrate how his service significantly advanced KVC’s mission.

9 New Appointments to the KVC Health Systems Board of Directors

We’re proud to announce the appointment of several accomplished leaders to our KVC Health Systems Board of Directors and the KVC Foundation Board of Directors.

16 St. Louis Children’s Hospital & KVC Health Systems: Partners in Pediatric Mental Health

As experts in children’s mental health and invested members of our community, St. Louis Children’s and KVC are closing a critical care gap for kids suffering from mental health conditions. Learn more about the world-class children’s behavioral health hospital and outpatient treatment center we’re building in Webster Groves, MO.



22 Kindness Changes Lives

We love to recognize employees who embody our values and serve others with excellence. Let’s celebrate some KVC team members making a difference!

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

B. Wayne Sims — Co-Chair and Past CEO
John Barnes — Co-Chair
Ted Armstrong
Melissa Beltrame
Patrick Desbois
William (Bill) Dunn, Jr.
Peggy Gordin
Jason Hooper
Teresa Markowitz
Brian Salmo
Bill Self
David Ball — Director Emeritus


LEADERSHIP TEAM

Jason R. Hooper, M.S.W.
President & Chief Executive Officer
Erin Stucky, L.S.C.S.W.
Chief Operations Officer
Chad E. Anderson, L.S.C.S.W.
Chief Clinical Officer
Lonnie Johnson
Chief Information Officer
Sherri Lohe
Chief Financial Officer
Cheryl Marquardt, J.D.
General Counsel
Kimberly O’Connor-Soule, L.S.C.S.W.
Senior Inpatient Officer –
Camber Mental Health | President
Children’s Mercy + Camber Mental Health
Lindsey Stephenson, L.S.C.S.W., L.C.S.W.
President – KVC Missouri
Dr. Linda Bass, L.C.M.F.T.
President – KVC Kansas
Gina Klyachkin, M.S.W., L.C.S.W., L.I.C.S.W.
President – KVC Kentucky
Ashley Brown, L.C.S.W.
President – KVC Nebraska
Erin Keltner, L.C.S.W., L.I.C.S.W.
President – KVC West Virginia
Michelle Lawrence
President – KVC Foundation
Renny Christian Arensberg, M.A.
Executive Vice President of
Employee Engagement
Katie Easley
Executive Vice President of
Strategy & Planning
Jenny Kutz, M.B.A.
Executive Vice President of
Marketing & Communications
Brent Lemon, L.C.S.W., L.I.C.S.W.
Executive Vice President –
Clinical AI Strategy
Erik Nyberg, M.H.S.A.
Executive Vice President of Technology
Venkata Rao, M.S.H.R.M., S.P.H.R.,
S.H.R.M.-S.C.P., L.S.S.B.B.
Executive Vice President of
Human Resources
Tabetha Vance
Executive Vice President of Finance
Robert (Bobby) Eklofe, M.H.S.A.
Executive Vice President of Inpatient
Operations – Camber Mental Health

See full leadership team at kvc.org/leaders.



We Were Scared, Overwhelmed and in Crisis — but with KVC's Help, We Found Peace



Raising a child with complex needs can be overwhelming and isolating. It can feel like there's nothing and no one available to help you, and that you should be able to figure it out on your own. When Lauren and Richard welcomed their miracle baby, Gabriel, they never imagined the complex needs he would have as he grew up. But those needs would lead them on a journey from crisis to hope as they discovered the support of organizations like KVC.

A Family in Crisis

Lauren and Richard lost their first baby in 2014, and they believed they might never be able to have children. When Lauren became pregnant again with Gabriel three years later, it felt like a miracle! The pregnancy was difficult and high-risk, but ultimately, they were able to bring home a baby boy. While Gabriel was colicky as a baby and rather sensitive to noises and touch, the real difficulty began in the toddler years.

Lauren and Richard quickly noticed that Gabriel's behavioral challenges were much more than those of a typical three-year-old. He started to become extremely violent toward his parents, even biting, kicking and punching. They tried many different interventions and consequences, but nothing seemed to help.

Things only seemed to get worse once Gabriel started kindergarten. The family had a 504 plan (a way for schools to provide support for students with disabilities so they can learn in a typical classroom) and an IEP (Individual Education Plan) for Gabriel. But his kindergarten was not equipped to handle his behavioral challenges. Gabriel would become violent with the teachers and was highly disruptive in class, with a teacher once losing their temper.

When Lauren spoke up about the issue, the school responded by removing Gabriel from the classroom. She remembers how hopeless and helpless she felt. *"I just didn't know how to help my child,"* recalls Lauren. *"I remember thinking, 'I don't even know what's wrong with him or why he's doing this.'"*

How CPS and Family Support Services Joined Forces to Help Gabriel

After Gabriel made a concerning comment that was later found to be untrue, a teacher followed protocol and contacted Child Protective Services (CPS). "The way we were raised is that you always fear CPS. I thought the only outcome was losing my child," says Lauren, remembering how afraid she was of the agent.

Yet it was immediately clear that Gabriel was physically healthy and well cared for. He showed

no signs of injury, wore clean, well-fitting clothes and had a well-kept room filled with toys. "And then here I am sitting in rags with bruises on me and a splint on my finger," shares Lauren, the irony not lost on her.

When the CPS agent asked about Lauren's injuries, she told the agent everything from Gabriel's lashing out at home and school, to how nothing seemed to help and how the family experienced heartbreaking challenges every day.

"The agent said, 'This is not an abused child case by any means, and we're going to get you the help you need,'" Lauren remembers. While Lauren was still unsure of what would happen next, she now looks back at that moment as a turning point. Her son's life was about to change for the better.

A Lifeline through KVC

CPS connected Lauren with KVC, where she met their Family Care Coordinator. With the multitude of challenges, Lauren was still skeptical about KVC's ability to really help.

"But I was willing to try anything!" she says. As a nonprofit that specializes in helping families in crisis, KVC was instrumental in connecting the family to many resources they needed for Gabriel.

In the beginning, KVC team members helped Lauren complete applications to various resources and programs, showed her how to organize her records to make these processes easier and advocated for the family on every phone call and application process. Their Family Care Coordinator helped Lauren take decisive action to make sure Gabriel got the help he needed, going above and beyond every step of the way.

The  of our work is helping people.



KVC
KANSAS VOLUNTARY
COUNSELING

Gabriel had seemed to be doing better for a while, and Lauren was feeling encouraged. But suddenly, he went through an intense episode while on the school bus. As Gabriel got very upset, convinced he was covered in spiders, the driver had to stop the bus and called Lauren for help. This scary incident left Lauren frantic and unsure where to turn. Her first call was to her KVC Family Care Coordinator, who immediately came over to help and went with Lauren to a child crisis stabilization center once they were able to set up safe transportation for Gabriel.

The KVC team fully supported Lauren until Gabriel was safely back home and calm in his bed. As his medication was adjusted, the Family Care Coordinator called the family nearly every day for a week to check on his progress, offer support and make sure they had everything they needed. “She went above and beyond what her job title was,” effuses Lauren.

Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)

The other key member of Gabriel’s KVC care team was their Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) clinician, Paige. Gabriel loved it when Paige came to visit, and she helped the family establish more positive and effective interactions, with everything from playtime to discipline.

Paige equipped the family with all kinds of individualized tools they could use and taught Gabriel healthy ways to express his emotions and work through them. One year after beginning PCIT, the family visited Gabriel’s aunt’s house. Gabriel accidentally left a candy wrapper on the couch, and his aunt pointed it out, not expecting a positive reaction. To her surprise, Gabriel calmly apologized and immediately picked up the trash and threw it away.

Lauren’s sister was pleasantly surprised and joked, “That is not my nephew! Where is my nephew?” But Lauren knew this shift was the result of plenty of hard work. “That is a year of therapy. A year of doing PCIT and working with him,” Lauren shared with her sister.



A Path to Stability and Hope

The family has now completed the program and concluded their time with KVC, but Lauren feels more empowered and supported than ever. She explains that Gabriel still does have his setbacks, but they’re able to navigate through them thanks to the tools and support KVC helped equip them with, from interventions to essential medical equipment.

Today, Lauren is at peace knowing that if they need help again, KVC is only a phone call away. *“Our Family Care Coordinator told me that if I ever needed KVC again, I could reach out and they’ll be there to help. That right there made it so that I know that through the rest of this journey, I won’t have to be alone. There will be somebody there to help me, and that means a whole lot.”*

Learn more about how KVC empowers families at kvc.org/familysupport.

You can also get free resources from our child behavior experts to help you form a strong, life-long bond with your child or teen, improve communication and create a peaceful, loving home at kvc.org/parenting-tips.

New Appointments

to the KVC Health Systems and KVC Foundation Boards of Directors

We’re proud to announce the appointment of several accomplished leaders to our board of directors.



Melissa Beltrame, Senior Vice President and Marketing Director of nbkc bank in Kansas City, and **Brian Salmo**, Chief Operating Officer of Hermann Companies in St. Louis, have joined the KVC Health Systems Board of Directors.



Both bring extensive experience in strategic leadership, brand growth and organizational innovation. Their insights and passion for strengthening communities will play an essential role in guiding KVC’s national impact.

Beltrame previously served on the KVC Foundation Board of Directors, and Salmo previously served on the KVC Missouri Board of Directors.

New Appointments to the KVC Foundation Board of Directors



Evan Howe, KS StateBank Director, is now Chair of the KVC Foundation Board of Directors after several years of service. Additionally, joining the KVC Foundation Board



are **Cynthia Simpson**, EVP/ Executive Director of Marketing, Communication and Enterprise Sales & Service at UMB Bank, and **Greg Porter**, Principal of the government and public affairs firm CATALYST. Both have been involved in their communities and not-for-profit causes that help families.



“We’re thrilled to welcome Melissa, Brian, Evan, Cynthia and Greg — leaders who share our vision for creating healthy, connected communities,” said Jason Hooper, President and CEO of KVC Health Systems.

Learn more at kvc.org/board

KVC Event Recap



2025 KVC Gala: Candlelight Club



KVC Missouri's Golf Classic for Kids



KVC Junior Golf Festival Day at the Woodford Club



End of School Year Party for students at KVC Academy



Purses with a Purpose Fundraising Luncheon

The Power of Nutrition in Mental Wellness

Have you ever noticed how what you eat can change how you feel? It's not in your head; nutrition plays a real role in mental wellness and recovery.

How Nutrition Impacts Mental Health and Wellbeing

Nutrition and mental wellbeing are inextricably linked, making it an invaluable part of mental health care. Camber Mental Health's registered dietitian, Kristin Porter, explains that a nutrient-dense diet is vital for mental and emotional health. "Nutrition supports your brain function, mood regulation and mental clarity," explains Kristin.



"A nutrient-dense diet can reduce inflammation, improve your gut health and cognitive function, which can help with stress management."

— Kristin Porter, Dietitian

Key Nutrients for Mental Wellness

Eating the proper nutrients to boost brain health and mental wellness is important! Here are the nine key nutrients that help to regulate mood and improve brain health:

Vitamin/Nutrient	Mental Health Benefits	Foods to Eat
Omega-3 Fatty Acids	Improves mood stability and cognitive function	Fish, chia seeds, walnuts, olive oil
Magnesium	Unblocks NMDA receptors for healthy brain development	Almonds, spinach, cashews, peanuts, seeds
B Vitamins	Assists brain cell development and serotonin production	Eggs, salmon, leafy greens, legumes, yogurt, meat
Antioxidants (Vitamins E + C)	Reduce oxidative stress	Berries, coffee, green tea, dark chocolate
Zinc	Helps the brain direct cellular activities	Spinach, garbanzo beans, cashews, yogurt, mushrooms
Iron	Assists neurotransmitter production	Red meat, fish, eggs, legumes, leafy greens, seeds
Amino Acids	Assists neurotransmitter production	Eggs, cheese, quinoa, soybeans, pumpkin seeds, tofu
Probiotics	Maintain healthy gut bacteria	Kombucha, yogurt, kimchi, cottage cheese, sourdough
Vitamin D	Reduces brain inflammation and supports neurotransmitter production	Egg yolk, salmon, tuna, oranges, broccoli

Mindful Eating and Mental Health

Mindful eating involves focusing on what you eat, from the taste in the moment to how it makes your body feel. Porter describes mindful eating as "improving emotional regulation by increasing your awareness of triggers and behaviors." Rather than a diet that focuses on what not to eat or portion control, mindful eating is about letting your body tell you what you need and tuning in to hunger and fullness cues.

Mindful eating also shifts the story surrounding "good foods" and "bad foods." All foods can be good foods in moderation, and mindful eating focuses on providing our bodies with what they need. Mindful eating has many health benefits. It helps reduce stress and fosters a positive relationship with food; it can even enhance digestion and gut health!

For parents and caregivers wanting to help their child with mindful eating, starting with a simple conversation can help. While enjoying a meal, talk to your child about the flavors and feelings they're experiencing with the food they're eating. Just thinking about and talking about what we're eating helps us get in tune with what our bodies need.

Camber Mental Health, a subsidiary of KVC Health Systems, is a network of inpatient and residential treatment centers with special expertise in caring for children and teens. Learn more about our Camber team's approach to nutrition at cambermentalhealth.org/nutrition



Camber Team Shares Their Mood-Boosting Meals

"Lots of veggies!! And something comforting, so either pasta, curry, soup or something with a lot of veggies."
— Kara, Music Therapist



"Pho. I grew up eating pho because I have a Vietnamese stepmom, and there is just something about it that makes me feel relaxed."
— Brenna, Behavioral Health Technician

"Boxed mac and cheese, it's just nostalgic."
— Camiela, Behavioral Health Technician



"I love medium rare ribeye, it helps me feel full for a long time and gives me a lot of energy! It's best paired with a baked potato and asparagus. I try to meal prep on Sundays to help with my busy weeks."
— Marolo, Medication Aide

"Fruit! I love avocado feta salad too. Healthy eating starts in your shopping cart, so make sure you have a good cart!"
— Elizabeth, Art Therapist



What to Expect as a New Foster Parent:

7 TIPS TO HELP YOU FEEL CONFIDENT AND PREPARED



While foster parenting can come with challenging moments, it can also be a profoundly meaningful and joyful experience.

Here are seven crucial aspects every new foster parent should expect:

① Reunification

It's important to remember that the ultimate goal of foster care is safe reunification. While reunification isn't the reality for every child or teen, foster parents should approach their role with the expectation of providing a temporary home while supporting a connection between the child and their biological family as they work toward safe reunification.

② To Maintain a Connection to Relationships and Cultural Ties

Foster parents should expect to help the child or teen remain connected to their biological families. This may include immediate family members and extended relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and more, whenever possible. These relationships are invaluable, and you can play a crucial role in facilitating and nurturing these connections.

Foster parents should also embrace cultural awareness by opening themselves up to learning and understanding diverse cultural norms and traditions. This helps youth develop a stronger sense of identity and self-assurance.

③ Childhood Trauma

Every child has their own unique past, and some may have experienced trauma. Many youth in foster care have faced traumatic situations at home, such as abuse, neglect, parental incarceration, or other serious family challenges that can impact how they cope and connect with others.

When caring for a child or teen who has experienced trauma, practicing patience is crucial. Using trauma-informed practices is a simple yet effective way to build trust with the youth in your care. Trauma-informed practices aim to acknowledge trauma through positive, proactive and restorative interactions.

④ To Need Self-Care

It's completely normal and expected to require more self-care than you might have expected, especially as you navigate numerous new responsibilities. Too often, new foster parents overlook the importance of prioritizing self-care. However, to be an effective foster parent, your self-care cup must be refilled.

⑤ To Lean on Your Support System

Having a support system of relatives, friends and professional contacts can significantly improve your experience as a foster parent. Part of being a successful foster parent is learning when to seek support from those who are there to help and reaching out when you need more support. Something as simple

as talking to a counselor or therapist can provide valuable coping skills to help you through challenging moments. KVC offers an abundance of foster parent resources and guidance to support you throughout your journey.

⑥ An Emotional Rollercoaster

It's important and necessary to prepare for an emotional rollercoaster, not only for the child but for yourself as well. As you navigate the ups and downs of foster parenting, you can expect to experience both highs and lows. Be kind to yourself, practice patience, give yourself grace, and remember that you're doing your best for both the youth in your care and yourself.

⑦ Fulfillment, Meaning and Joy!

Foster parenting can be heart-wrenching at times, but it also brings immense joy! At KVC, what matters most is how much you care. As a foster parent, you provide a safe and loving environment, and in doing so, you have a powerful opportunity to find personal fulfillment while showing a child or teen the love and care they deserve.

Through fostering, you'll experience joy and may even discover a deeper sense of purpose. Get started at kvc.org/foster.

Bridging Care and Healing: Is Treatment Foster Care Right for You?

Foster parents who care for youth with more complex needs through treatment or therapeutic foster care (TFC) are among our most dedicated and passionate caregivers, and they're a part of some of the most fulfilling stories and successes. TFC provides short-term services designed to create a more therapeutic environment for youth and combines the supportive aspects of foster care with clinical treatments typically found in residential mental health treatment settings. This provides a higher level of care to children and teens with significant medical, developmental, emotional or behavioral needs. Treatment-level foster parents also have more support and resources available to them so they can meet the higher needs of the youth in their care.

Giving these youth a chance to build a genuine connection with you and access treatment and services that support their health and development not only sets them up for success now but also benefits every interaction they have as they safely reunify with their family or move into adulthood.

Learn more about becoming a treatment-level foster parent in Kansas, Missouri, or Nebraska at kvc.org/tfc.



Expanding Hearts & Home:



The Easley Family's Story of Adoption and Parenthood

Brett and Katie Easley both grew up in tightly knit families and looked forward to having children of their own one day. After years of trying and doctor visits, this dream seemed like an impossibility. But what initially felt like an ending turned out to be only the beginning of their parenthood journey.

When Katie accepted a position with KVC, she learned about the opportunity to become a foster parent. "If we could not have children of our own, we could at least provide temporary love and support to children and families," reflected Brett.

Brett started working for KVC soon after as well, so the two weren't able to become licensed through KVC. They found another agency and soon became licensed foster parents. A two-year-old sister and four-year-old brother came to live with them. With reunification impossible, Brett and Katie were overjoyed to adopt these siblings into their family.

After a few years, Brett and Katie became relicensed and were eager to resume supporting youth and families in need. "It was definitely a decision that the family made to move forward and bring a couple of other kids into the home," Brett said. "My daughter wanted a sister. My son wanted a brother." Both of their children got their wish soon enough!

They initially cared for a few infants, who were safely reunified or went on to kinship care. Eventually, Brett and Katie fostered the next two children they would adopt: an eight-year-old girl and a ten-year-old boy, who were younger than their other two children.

Now a family of six, the Easleys decided they were up for taking on one more child. At the time, they were providing respite care for other foster families. One boy whom they cared for frequently really liked being a part of the Easley household. They soon discovered this boy had three siblings, a brother and two sisters!

"Pretty soon, we had four regular visitors," said Brett. "Before you know it, the four regular visitors became permanent additions to the family." These four children, between the ages of five and nine, were eventually adopted by the Easleys. This brings their household up to ten!

"When you invite a kid into your home, the connection happens pretty quickly; it's a lot easier than you think to feel like this about every kid that's in your care."

—Katie Easley

At this point, Brett and Katie felt certain they were done adding children to their family. A couple of years went by, then the unexpected happened: Katie was pregnant! "We had been married for eighteen years at this point. We had eight kids. Our life was busy already!" reflects Katie on the big surprise.

While it was a shock to the family, it was a welcome shock. As wild as it was to have a four-month-old baby in the arms of their oldest child when he graduated from high school, their entire family shared in the joy!

Brett and Katie worked closely with KVC in many ways during their journey, both as employees and as foster and adoptive parents! KVC team members partnered with Brett and Katie on all of their adoptions, and KVC case workers were happy to support the family throughout their adoption processes.

As an employer, Brett and Katie appreciate how flexible KVC has been with their needs to work around the schedules of nine children and teens. It's important we support our team members in growing their families, no matter what that looks like for them. KVC offers parental leave for employees to care for a newborn child or when they begin caring for a child or teen through either foster care or adoption.

For those considering becoming foster or adoptive parents, Brett and Katie have a word of advice: It's not as scary as some people think. "At the end of the day, they're just children — some of whom have been through a lot of trauma and need a little extra patience, but ultimately, these children have the same needs influencing their wellbeing as any other child," shared Brett.

If you've been considering opening your home to a child or teen in foster care, get free resources and read more real-life stories at kvc.org/foster



KVC & St. Louis Children's Hospital: Partners in Pediatric Mental Health

St. Louis Children's Hospital and KVC Health Systems have teamed up to address the children's mental health crisis. The partners are creating a new world-class children's behavioral health hospital and outpatient treatment center on KVC Missouri's Children's Mental Wellness Campus in Webster Groves, MO.

St. Louis has fewer than half of the pediatric mental health beds needed, and this shortage often results in kids spending far too long in emergency rooms without receiving appropriate care. To best meet the critical needs of kids today, we are working toward providing a full continuum of mental health care in a safe and healing environment for children, team members and the community.

KVC will continue to operate its K-12 therapeutic school and a range of community-based services on its campus. In addition, through the partnership with St. Louis Children's, we will provide an expanded range of mental health services, including:

- ▶ 65 inpatient beds for kids who need close medical supervision and care.
- ▶ 12 residential beds, located in the hospital, for kids experiencing emotional and mental health challenges who will benefit from extended clinical treatment.
- ▶ Outpatient care for patients who need ongoing treatment.

Children will be cared for by pediatric mental health experts including those from KVC's inpatient treatment team, **Camber Mental Health**, and

St. Louis Children's long-time physician and academic partner, **WashU Medicine**.

KVC Missouri and St. Louis Children's recently hosted a community open house to provide tours, answer questions, and share what's ahead for our campus. Here are some moments from the event!

Stay up to date and check out some FAQs at kvcmo.org/leadingchange



We have begun construction and expect to open late 2026. We are looking forward to a Topping Out Ceremony this December.

Meet Children Who Need a Forever Family

We're honored to play a role in matching children and teens 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 who need a loving, life-long family who will help them thrive. To inquire, contact KVC Kansas' adoption team at 1-888-655-5500 or adoptionsspecialist@kvc.org. To see children and teens near you who need adoptive families, visit **AdoptUSKids.org**.

ZAYDEN, ZAYONN, BREZHAUNA (7-16)

Zayden considers himself a kind and caring individual! Warm hugs make him feel appreciated. Zayden is an eager participant when it comes to sports, and takes pride in his reading abilities and the progress he continues to make. Easy-going and energetic is the best way to describe Zayonn! He is a happy child and loves to play football, do gymnastics and is learning to play piano! Zayonn's dynamic personality is known to brighten a room. Brezhauna is always encouraging everyone to get along both at home and in her friend group. Brezhauna is a lover of the arts; she sings, draws and dances. She is a warm soul who finds gratitude in simple acts of kindness, such as someone cooking her breakfast or sharing a joke with her.

Watch our video online! kvc.org/adopt-siblings



THOMAS (12)

The king of adventure, Thomas, will always be up for trying something new! He hopes to have a family that enjoys activities like go-karting, dirt biking or riding four-wheelers. Some of Thomas' interests include football, bowling and playing his Nintendo Switch! He enjoys being silly with his friends and loves to laugh. Thomas desires a family who can provide one-on-one time as needed to create a close bond.

Watch my video online! kvc.org/Thomas



LUCY (16)

Lucy has a sweet, playful personality that always captures the hearts of those around her! She will bring laughter into a family and encourage others to be goofy with her. Lucy has a knack for art. She jumps at the opportunity to be creative, whether it's coloring or painting! Lucy loves to take part in organized activities such as bowling or swimming. Lucy's main method of communication is through sign language and would benefit from a family with prior knowledge or experience.

Watch my video online! kvc.org/Lucy



JOSIAH (13) & SKYLA (10)

Big brother, Josiah, is an active and creative 14-year-old who loves playing basketball and baseball. If you're ever down for a friendly Nerf gun war, Josiah is your guy! Also, in touch with his creative side, Josiah has a passion for painting and writing. Skyla is a sweet and silly 11-year-old. Her bright laugh will bring smiles to any audience! A big fan of JoJo Siwa, she loves creating fun dance routines to her favorite songs. She also loves intricate coloring pages!

Watch our video online! kvc.org/Josiah&Skyla



Scarlett's Reunification Story:

A Journey of *Love, Healing* and *Homecoming*

Trent and Mindy already had four biological children when they decided to open their home to children in foster care. When they welcomed Scarlett into their care, they knew from the start that the goal would be to safely reunify Scarlett with her biological family. But what they never expected was the lifelong bonds they would form both with Scarlett and her mother.

Becoming Foster Parents

Trent and Mindy were familiar with foster care and always knew foster parenting was something they wanted to do. The family moved into a larger house with three acres of land, two horses and a dog. Now in their new home, they knew the time was right to become foster parents.

The first step for Trent and Mindy was to discuss with their children what being a foster family would look like. "Deciding to become a foster family was really a family decision," explains Mindy. "We felt it was important that our children were on board because this was going to impact their lives greatly as well, and we didn't want to ignore that impact on them."

Mindy and Trent gave their children a lot of space to be honest and open about how they felt. Because they were honest and supportive of one another, they were able to work through any questions and concerns and grow stronger as a family.

Meeting Scarlett

When they received the call saying Scarlett needed a foster home, Trent and Mindy felt both excited and nervous. The moment the case worker arrived with Scarlett in her arms, Mindy could tell Scarlett was frightened. But Mindy and Scarlett bonded right away. Scarlett spent the first few hours just sitting in Mindy's lap.

As she reflects, Mindy is amazed at Scarlett's bravery and how well she adjusted. "When I think about all the adjustments that everyone had to make, **I think about how Scarlett was the most courageous person in the whole situation,**" Mindy says. "She was coming into a stranger's home. She didn't know us at all."



Helping Scarlett Overcome Challenges

One key challenge in caring for Scarlett was communication, as she had a significant speech delay. "We worked really hard at finding ways that she could use sign language, and even that was challenging at times," recalls Mindy. "When we finally got to the place where she could tell us that she needed to go to the bathroom, it was such a celebration, and such a joy to be able to know that we were understanding her and she was understanding us."

While these challenges were difficult to work through, Trent and Mindy saw their time with Scarlett as a blessing. **"One of the biggest gifts was the opportunity to love her and to be loved by her,"** says Trent. "What a gift to see this little girl that we didn't know come into our home with people that she didn't know and settle in, becoming part of the family, was unbelievable."



The Goal of Reunification

Trent and Mindy were so grateful for the support of Scarlett's case worker, who helped them understand the steps toward safe reunification. From the start, Scarlett's mother was open to them and developed a positive relationship with Mindy. Having everyone on the same team made the whole process so much smoother.

Saying goodbye to Scarlett, a child their family had grown to love and care for so deeply, was difficult. When the time came for Scarlett to go home,



Mindy and Trent both described the experience as bittersweet. There was heartache in saying goodbye to Scarlett, but also joy in knowing she would be safely reunited with her mom.

"Trent and I were very intentional in wanting to honor Scarlett's mother's role in her life and recognize that no one can replace her parents," says Mindy. "We stepped in for a time, but there is a special place that biological parents hold in their children's hearts, as it should be."

Trent and Mindy have been able to continue the strong relationship with Scarlett and her biological mom following reunification. "The opportunity to see her and continue to interact with her has been a real gift, and I recognize that's not always the case. We feel really, really blessed," says Trent.

Watch Scarlett's reunification video at kvc.org/scarlett

Children May Not Remember Trauma, But Their Bodies Do



The impact of trauma extends beyond emotions, leaving lasting imprints on the body, brain and overall wellbeing. Understanding trauma opens the door to healing and resilience.

What is Trauma?

According to the Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center, trauma “results from exposure to an incident or series of events that are emotionally disturbing or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional and/or spiritual wellbeing.”

Trauma is more common than you might think.

It is estimated that 2 out of 3 youth will be exposed to trauma before the age of 16. Traumatic childhood experiences can include abuse, neglect, parental substance abuse, natural disasters and other life-altering events.

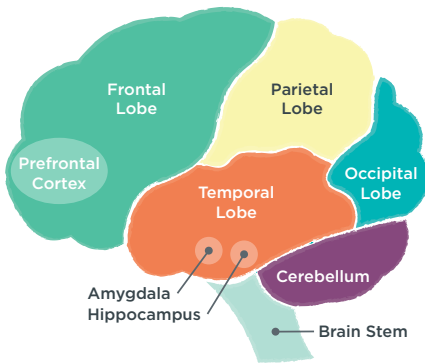
How Trauma Is Stored in the Body

Trauma is often associated with physical symptoms like:

- ▶ A clenched jaw
- ▶ Muscle tension
- ▶ Shallow breathing
- ▶ Chest tightness

These are all symptoms of trauma being stored in the hippocampus and amygdala: the emotional

and memory centers of the brain. These parts of the brain store memories of trauma — even when a child or teen does not consciously remember the traumatic experiences.



When triggered by a perceived threat, the brain activates the “fight-or-flight” response to stop the trauma from processing. Because the brain never fully processes the trauma, it continues to remain stored in the body.

The Impact of Trauma on Brain Development and Function

Experiencing trauma impacts behavior, biological development and even later-life health. While each person is different and processes trauma in individual, unique ways, there are several possible neurobiological impacts on a child’s body as a result of trauma, whether they remember it or not.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION ISSUES

The mental skills required for healthy emotional and behavioral responses — largely supported by the prefrontal cortex — are known as executive functions. Executive functions include:

- ▶ **Working memory:** Temporarily storing and working with information inputs without losing track of active tasks.

- ▶ **Cognitive flexibility:** Shifting thinking between different thoughts and ideas, as well as the ability to change and adapt based on these new perspectives.
- ▶ **Inhibitory control:** Suppressing irrelevant thoughts, impulses and behaviors to “think before you act.”

Childhood trauma can hinder all of these executive functions. Maltreatment in childhood rewires the structure, function and connectivity of prefrontal regions of the brain, impairing everything from conflict monitoring to decision-making.

EMOTIONAL DYSREGULATION

Children develop emotional awareness, understanding and regulation as a result of interactions with parents, caregivers and other supportive adults. However, when those caregiving figures expose the child to abuse, neglect or other maltreatment, it is difficult for the child to effectively develop those emotion regulation skills.

DISSOCIATION

A person who has experienced childhood trauma may struggle with dissociation: feelings of disconnection from themselves or the world around them. Dissociation can sometimes be a helpful tool for managing high-stress or traumatic situations. However, it can become a coping mechanism as a result of ongoing exposure to trauma, leading to chronic physical symptoms.

ELEVATED STRESS AND ASSOCIATED HEALTH RISKS

Chronic exposure to abuse and neglect builds elevated stress hormones in the brain. This ongoing, toxic stress can lead to an increased risk of many negative physical and mental health outcomes.



Building Resilience and Healing from Trauma

Trauma can have a lifelong impact on our bodies and our brains. But there is good news: **Our brains can change, and it’s never too late for change to occur.**

The human brain is developing every second of every day, long into adulthood. Our brains can learn how to solve complex problems and bounce back after difficult situations. **This means that children who have experienced trauma are still capable of healing and building resilience with proper care and treatment.**

Parents and caregivers can help build resilience in children through positive childhood experiences (PCEs) like:

- ▶ Creating opportunities to discuss and accept feelings
- ▶ Participating in community traditions
- ▶ Creating a safe, protective home environment

The most powerful tool for treating childhood trauma and building resilience is **connection**: that sense of belonging, feeling valued and seen by others.

At KVC Health Systems, we are committed to providing research-based, trauma-informed interventions and services to support children, teens and families experiencing or healing from trauma. Part of this involves aligning our child and family services to neuroscience, prioritizing healthy brain development as a key component of behavioral and mental health care.

You can find more resources at kvc.org/trauma



Through **Kindness Changes Lives**, we celebrate team members who are positive to KVC's culture and exemplify our values like being authentic, showing compassion, fighting to preserve family connections, being a collaborator, working towards continuous improvement and showing urgency and innovation.



Victor Arndt

**Behavioral Health Technician,
Camber Children's Mental Health**

"Vic always goes above and beyond; he actively engages the kids with meaningful activities and mentorship. Just now, he is reading a story to an 11-year-old who was acting out, taking

them from what would have been a moment alone, and he turned it into an opportunity to connect. This example exemplifies his personality and drive to help the most disparaged and misunderstood members of our community."

Linda Bass

**President,
KVC Kansas**

"I have been able to count on Linda in any and all areas. Linda has a way to make you feel at ease and comfortable. And having such a big role with this agency makes me even more impressed that she has made the time to support our program and me with all the other job duties she has. Linda is a true leader and shows great support and compassion to the agency, employees and families."



Brooke Lilly

**Clinical Specialist,
KVC Kentucky**

"I recently joined the KVC family, and from day one, Brooke has welcomed me and encouraged me along the way. She let me shadow her on several occasions and answered any questions I had. It makes a difference

when a person is willing to assist the 'new person'. It makes you feel welcome. Brooke has done an amazing job assisting me and is an excellent colleague."

Breanna McGilton

**Licensing and Placement Specialist,
KVC Missouri**

"Breanna is kind, welcoming, and supportive toward the other people on the team, and she is communicative and supportive with the families she works with. A family she works with recently shared the following about Breanna: 'Our summer plan for childcare for one of our youth fell through due to behaviors. We were feeling lost, and Breanna secured us a respite care provider for the days we needed to work. It made us feel like we were not in this alone and someone had our backs. It truly takes a village, and we are thankful Breanna is part of our team.'"



Caitlin Nichols

**Foster-Adoptive Care Case Manager,
West Virginia**

"Caitlin is a kind, compassionate advocate for her clients. An action of Caitlin's that highlights her character is that she writes all of her foster care youth clients a birthday card at

the beginning of every month. Such a simple, but powerful way to touch her clients' lives."

Neisha Ward

**Foster Care Case Manager,
KVC Missouri**

"Recently, Neisha supported a child whose mother had suffered a traumatic brain injury and was placed on life support. Neisha made multiple trips transporting the girl to visit her mother in the hospital. This effort required hours and hours of driving for Neisha. These visits were so important and helped the girl to understand her mother's very serious condition and allowed her to spend precious moments with the mother she loved and relied on. Neisha went so above and beyond to support this child's emotional wellbeing."



Chaz Selph

**AI Solutions Developer,
KVC Health Systems**

"Chaz is not only knowledgeable and good at his job, but he is also friendly, personable, and easy to talk to. Chaz's role primarily focuses on providing high-quality technical support and helping ensure

reports are working properly, affecting our clinician teams with pertinent patient information. Chaz, thank you for all you do at KVC! You are making a huge difference."

**Chaz has grown his role from Software Engineer to AI Solutions Developer, helping guide our team down the AI pathway providing a high-quality approach to innovation.*

Hannah Tamayo

**Director of Developmental Disability Services,
KVC Nebraska**

"I recently returned to work after having my second daughter. Being a mom to a new little person and coming back to work can be challenging physically and emotionally. Hannah had gone through this experience recently, so she sent me a kind email checking in on how I was doing. I don't work directly with Hannah on a daily basis, so I really knew she went out of her way to think about me. Hannah made my day a little brighter and definitely made me feel cared for."



If you'd like to nominate someone who embodies KVC values, go to kvc.org/kcl



21350 West 153rd Street
Olathe, Kansas 66061
www.kvc.org



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Kansas City, MO
Permit No. 1996

Please Recycle 



*Are you inspired
by these stories?*

Want to help children, teens
and families thrive? Support
our work at kvc.org/donate.

The advertisement for the KVC Swag Shop features three individuals against a teal background with a pattern of white handprints. A man on the left wears a light blue t-shirt with the text 'Dear Person Behind Me' and various icons. A woman in the center wears a yellow t-shirt with the text 'WE'RE ALL UNIQUE & WE ALL BELONG'. A third person, partially visible behind her, wears a dark blue t-shirt with the text 'FOSTER CARE IS A WORK OF heart'. To the right, a white water bottle has the text 'IT'S A GOOD DAY TO TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH'. The KVC logo is visible on all items. The background also features a large yellow brushstroke with the KVC logo and the text 'KVC Swag Shop'.

KVC
Swag Shop

Show your KVC pride in
more ways than ever before!

**SHOP
NOW!**



Now Open 24/7
365 days a year!