



EMPOWERED FAMILIES KANSAS



CHILD WELFARE PROJECT REPORT

IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR
CHILDREN EXPOSED TO
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN KANSAS

February 2020

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

Empowered Families Kansas is a 4-year demonstration project of the Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence (KCSDV).

In 2016, KCSDV was one of 12 sites nationally to be awarded the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services *Specialized Services for Abused Parents and Their Children* grant. KCSDV focused on three strategies to build evidence-based practices that improve outcomes for children and youth exposed to domestic violence and their non-abusing parents or caregivers. This report focuses on one strategy of Empowered Families Kansas – the child welfare project.



CHILD WELFARE PROJECT STRATEGY:

Improve the response by Kansas child welfare professionals to the needs of children and their non-abusing parents or caregivers when domestic violence and child abuse co-occur.

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HISTORY

In 1999, KCSDV began partnerships on the state level to develop and implement safe and appropriate responses to the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse.

In 2003, KCSDV partnered with the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (Kansas Department for Children and Families) to conduct the first-ever safety and accountability assessment of Kansas child protective services' response to domestic violence. Key findings informed strategies and a robust child and youth project was developed that focused on improving child welfare responses to the safety needs of children and their non-abusive parents.

Administration changes in 2012 resulted in the elimination of project staff and funding over a 4-year period. During that time, capacity to appropriately respond to the needs of children and families experiencing domestic violence significantly decreased. No active projects addressing this need were available in Kansas until KCSDV formed the Empowered Families Kansas child welfare project in 2016.

TIMELINE

■ 1999 – 2012

Domestic violence child welfare project developed & implemented across Kansas.

■ 2012 – 2016

Administration changes result in elimination of project staff & funding. Decreased capacity in Kansas becomes evident.

■ 2016 – 2020

Empowered Families Kansas demonstration project formed & child welfare project re-established.
Demonstration grant ends September 30, 2020.

The ultimate goal is to increase children's safety and permanency in Kansas.

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CHALLENGES

- Child abuse is closely linked to domestic violence – more than 30 studies illustrate a co-occurrence rate of between **30-60%**.
- In these cases, **the safety of children and their non-abusive victim parents are inextricably linked**, requiring unique safety considerations and strategies by the child welfare system.
- The true prevalence of domestic violence in Kansas child welfare cases is not measured. Kansas child welfare professionals believe it is present in **25-50%** of their caseloads.
- Over **63%** of Kansas child welfare needs assessment respondents reported they have not received specialized training on how to provide child welfare services to families experiencing domestic violence. Over **53%** were unsure whether their agency has policies or procedures that address domestic violence.

SOLUTIONS

- Increase Kansas child welfare professionals' understanding of domestic violence.
- Increase Kansas child welfare professionals' skills to safely and appropriately address domestic violence.
 - Screening
 - Interviewing
 - Risk & Protective Factors
 - Safety Assessments
 - Family Safety Plans
 - Family Case Plans
 - Documentation
 - Strengthening Resiliency
 - Resources & Referrals
- Increase the frequency and strength of collaboration between Kansas child welfare and domestic violence service providers.

Trauma-informed resources, education, training, and technical assistance were implemented across all components of the child welfare project.

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CURRENT OUTCOMES

1,000+ Child Welfare
Domestic Violence Manuals
disseminated

1,389 Kansas child welfare
professionals trained

Evaluation data for all outcome measures
show an increase over the
pre-test mean.



"I will be able to better identify signs of domestic abuse and trauma responses to be able to better serve my clients. I will be able to better advocate for both my kids and parents."

– Child Welfare Training Participant

- I understand domestic violence advocacy services that are available to survivors.
- I understand the different ways that domestic violence can impact children.
- I understand the different ways domestic violence can impact parents' relationships with their children.
- I understand the different ways that survivors support their children.
- I understand the different ways that domestic violence can impact parenting.

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NEXT STEPS

- Implement data tracking methods that measure the prevalence of domestic violence in Kansas child welfare cases.
- Work with child welfare service provider agencies to develop and implement policies, procedures, and practices that safely address domestic violence.
- Build collaborative relationships between child welfare and domestic violence service providers.
- Provide frequent and ongoing training and education, as child welfare service provider changes and staff turnover make it difficult to sustain capacity.

“There is a need to build partnerships in Kansas that can ensure the work to address the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse is sustainable and ongoing. The lives of many Kansans depend on it.”

*—Joyce Grover, KCSDV
Executive Director*



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This project was made possible by Grant Number 90EV0446 from the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.