



O'Connell
CHILDREN'S SHELTER

**2024 IMPACT
REPORT**

Serving Kansas communities since 1976

'WE WILL NOT STOP HERE'

Gina Meier-Hummel

Executive Director

2024

At O'Connell Children's Shelter, we believe that hope doesn't just appear—it's planted through early support, nurtured through partnership, and sustained by care. In 2024, we lived that belief across two powerful branches of our work: prevention and residential care.

Through our prevention programs, we met families at the first signs of struggle. From truancy and early diversion to in-home therapy and multi-generational case management, we provided the structure and resources families needed to stay together and thrive. These services didn't wait for crisis—they responded when families were still reachable and resilient.

But when home is no longer a safe or stable option, we continue to grow hope through our residential program. In our licensed homes and therapeutic Ranch, we provided youth in the child welfare system with safety, structure, and the tools to rebuild. We also allowed youth in crisis the opportunity to stabilize through emergency placements and respite stays.

We continue to expand early access to support, deepen our community partnerships with schools, courts, and state agencies, and deliver meaningful outcomes for the youth and families we serve. This impact report reflects how, together with our community, we are growing stronger systems of care—rooted in compassion, built to last. We invite you to join us by volunteering, becoming a mentor, becoming a foster parent, or donating to support this meaningful work.

FOR MORE DETAILS PLEASE CONTACT US
AT INFO@OCONNELLCS.ORG



The earlier we're invited in, the more impact we can make.

Rooted in Community

Signs begin with quietly missed school days and unpaid bills causing rising stress in the home. When those early indications are met with support, families stay intact while children stay connected to their school, community, and family network. At O'Connell, the work we do is not done alone. It takes the trust of schools, the commitment of district attorneys, the vigilance of law enforcement, the compassion of therapists, and the partnerships of DCF and other community-based providers wrapping around a family unit to empower and create long term success.

That is the power of the work we do. It works best when it is timely, consistent, and rooted in relationships. At O'Connell, we believe help should arrive before a crisis. Our programs are designed to intervene early, support families and youth holistically, and prevent deeper system involvement.

We are proud to stand alongside those who believe in second chances, early support, and strong families. Together, we create pathways for youth to grow, for families to heal, and for entire communities to thrive. Because when we respond with care at the first sign of struggle, we plant the seeds of lasting change.

Nurturing Growth: Prevention Programming Generations (2Gen Program)

Family-center case management focused on stability, employment, housing, and parenting support. Designed to prevent system involvement by addressing needs early and supporting caregivers and children together. Serving families with at least one child (ages 0-18) experiencing housing instability, financial hardship, or early signs of system involvement. Taking referrals from schools, DCF, community partners, or the families themselves.

Fresh Start Kansas (EYDSO)

A diversion program for youth ages 12-17 that offers restorative services, case management, and incentives to prevent formal charges and build accountability through support—not punishment. Serving youth who are first-time or low-risk justice-involved. Taking referrals from law enforcement, family, school staff, or a district attorney.

Truancy Case Management

Pre-court intervention for students chronically absent from school. Case managers work with families and school staff to improve attendance, reduce risk, and connect families to needed resources. Serving middle or high school students showing pre-truancy or chronic absenteeism who reside in Douglas County. Taking referrals from school social workers, administrators, or school resource officers—no court filing required at time of referral.

Functional Family Therapy (FFT)

Short-term, in-home therapy that helps youth and caregivers improve communication, reduce conflict, and prevent deeper system involvement by restoring family stability. Serving youth (ages 11-18) and their caregivers who are willing to participate together. Taking referrals from juvenile justice, mental health providers, schools, DCF, or families themselves.

Intensive Family Services (IFS)

Our Intensive Family Services (IFS) program partners directly with families referred through the Department for Children and Families, offering in-home, trauma-informed support to strengthen relationships and stability. By tailoring case plans, providing ongoing parenting guidance, and coordinating with community resources, we help families stay safely together before they enter formal out-of-home placement.

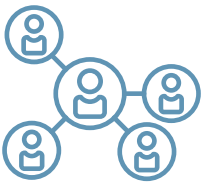
IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT SERVICES, PLEASE CONTACT US AT PREVENTION@OCONNELLCS.ORG.

Interruption of the Pipeline

These numbers demonstrate the cost-saving and trauma-reducing power of prevention programs from a systemic lens.



Every number represents a real family that found support when it mattered most.



Each connection to additional programs opened new doors to safety, stability, and hope.



By learning about resources, families became more confident navigating life's challenges.



Self-sufficiency isn't just a goal—it's a lasting outcome of prevention done right.

Why It Matters

Our programs do more than respond to crises—they prevent them. By supporting youth before behaviors escalate, we help families stay safely together and avoid deeper system involvement. This early intervention not only reduces long-term costs for families, schools, and courts, but also builds trust and stability where it matters most: at home and in the community. We focus on lasting change, not temporary solutions—strengthening families from the inside out and creating a foundation for lifelong success.

381

people were offered prevention services in 2024.



93%

of Generations participants who completed the program reported confidence in knowing where and how to access key government resources.



Early Support, Lasting Change

Every day, O'Connell's prevention programs offer families practical support and hope—and behind every visit or case plan is real, measurable impact. This summary reflects the outcomes of our 2024 prevention work: reducing absenteeism, stabilizing families, and keeping youth out of the state system. Each number represents a life changed, made possible through strong community partnerships. Together, we're proving that early intervention works.

127

individuals received services and life-stabilizing resources through Generations—including housing support, employment assistance, and family-based case management that set the foundation for long-term success.

89%

of truancy cases were successfully completed, avoiding formal filings. Because of O'Connell intervention, these youth stayed out of court and gained the support they needed to return to school.

78

youth and their families are currently engaged in early diversion services. These are families receiving tailored support before court involvement—a critical window where prevention can change a life's trajectory.

60%

of families connected to multiple O'Connell programs (e.g., Generations and Truancy, or Generations and Functional Family Therapy (FFT)).

99

truant youth were referred directly by schools—a powerful signal that educators are actively seeking community-based support to help students re-engage and stabilize.

57%

of youth in our Generations program reported increased knowledge of post-secondary education. These are youth who now see a future that includes college, trade school, or continuing education—many for the first time.

38

families were supported through Intensive Family Services—helping them stay safely together with in-home support, resource connection, and personalized care plans.

37%

of all Generations referrals came from DCF offices across two regions. This demonstrates our strong partnership with DCF and our shared commitment to reaching families early—before deeper system involvement is needed.

59

truancy referrals involved families needing basic resources like food, housing, or clothing. When kids miss school, it's often a symptom of a deeper need—and O'Connell helps meet those needs first.



Relationships.
Building lasting healthy relationships for those who historically have none.

Dyre Plunkett,
Residential Director

Yearning.
It's what keeps me coming back, because how can you not want to help these kids?

Chaneton Thompson,
Case Services Supervisor



Proud.
Proud of the work the youth and staff do every day to change lives.

Jodie Rodriguez,
Residential Case Coordinator



Passionate.
We're passionate about working with families and kids in the community.

Mackenzie Hofstra,
Prevention Case Manager

O'Connell in One Word

Opportunity.
For both youth and families to grow and succeed.

Diane Owen,
Executive Assistant of Operations



Indomitable.
Like indomitable spirit. The part of each of us that provides hope, courage, and strength.

Adam Mitchell,
House Manager



Dedication.
Staff show up with care and commitment—and families feel it.

Meg Hasselman,
YRC Manager



Hope.
For us, hope is a verb. It's something we're doing.

Torrez Dawson,
Chief Operating Officer

Growth.
I'm proud of the work our clients and staff do, we're changing the future.

Emma Speer,
Prevention Case Manager





Dedicated.
Our agency as a whole is very dedicated to the community.

Sydnie Germany,
Prevention Clinician

Anchor.
OCS provides steady, grounding support for youth and families.

Savannah Wallentine,
Prevention Services Coordinator



Agile.
In the midst of everything we are always ready to think and move quickly for the people we serve.

Maddison House,
Prevention Case Manager



While prevention is our first line of defense, not every crisis can be avoided. When families cannot remain safely together, O'Connell becomes a place of safety, structure, and healing. Our residential program serves youth who need more than a plan—they need a home, a team, and the chance to rebuild in an environment that believes in their worth. When hope can't grow at home, we help it grow here.



Resilience.
Every chance we have to work with community members, it reminds me how resilient people are.

Cameron Roark,
Prevention Case Manager

Wrap-Around.
We're a one stop shop of support for our community.

Erin Harmon,
Prevention Services Director



Committed.
Getting up daily ready to walk alongside others willing to put in the work.

Maren Ludwig,
Development Director



Support.
We exist to uplift and empower people to help themselves.

Aubrey Cook,
Prevention Case Manager

Family.
No matter who it is, everyone always steps up and helps out.

Kennedy Deters,
Prevention Case Manager



When Hope Needs a Home

Residential Programming

When families cannot stay together safely, O'Connell provides a nurturing, trauma-informed setting for youth. With capacity for nearly 60 children across five licensed homes in Douglas County—including the Williams and Winter houses in Lawrence and the 120-acre Ranch—we offer a stable, structured environment staffed 24/7. Our homes integrate education, therapy, life skills, recreation, and community connection to help the youth, typically ages 10–18, build confidence and chart a path toward independence. Drawing on our historical experience providing emergency care to youth via police protective custody placements, we expanded residential program offerings to respite care for youth experiencing behavioral health crisis this year.



See us in action!



Garden Program

At O'Connell Children's Shelter, our Garden and Education Project offers youth hands-on learning in a nurturing, green environment. Guided by Master Gardener Susan Andersen and dedicated volunteers, participants grow fresh produce and gain essential life skills—teamwork, responsibility, and care for self and others. This program fosters emotional healing alongside nutritional education. It is not just a garden—it is a classroom of growth, resilience, and hope.



Grow What We Eat

The Garden's Unique Impact

Our garden is not just a space to grow food—it is a vital part of how we grow confidence, connection, and life skills in the youth we serve.

- ✔ Provides a calming, hands-on space for youth to learn responsibility, patience, and care.
- ✔ Teaches nutrition and self-sufficiency through the growing and harvesting of fresh food.
- ✔ Strengthens therapeutic goals by connecting youth to nature, routine, and a sense of accomplishment.



OVER

1,000 lbs

FRUITS, VEGETABLES, AND FLOWERS WERE HARVESTED FROM THE OCS GARDEN IN

2024

389

Hands-On Job Skills

hours of youth employment were completed through the garden—teaching responsibility, teamwork, and work readiness.

27

Fresh Food, Shared Freely

different fruits and vegetables grown were distributed to our residential homes and food-insecure families in our prevention programs.

236

From Garden to Table

Youth had the opportunity to learn real-world kitchen skills in food safety and preparation courses, including how to pickle and make fresh pico de gallo.

115

Pumpkins for All

Our fall harvest produced enough pumpkins to gift every residential home and prevention family a small joy grown from shared care.

Volunteer in the OCS Garden!



Connect with Susan

susana@oconnellcs.org



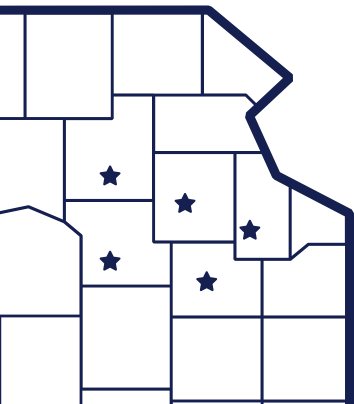
The Impact of Safe Space

Each data point reflects a moment of real impact—a child finding safety, a teen reaching a milestone, a family taking a step toward reunification. Behind every stay, every referral, and every transition is a story of resilience made possible through compassionate care and intentional support.

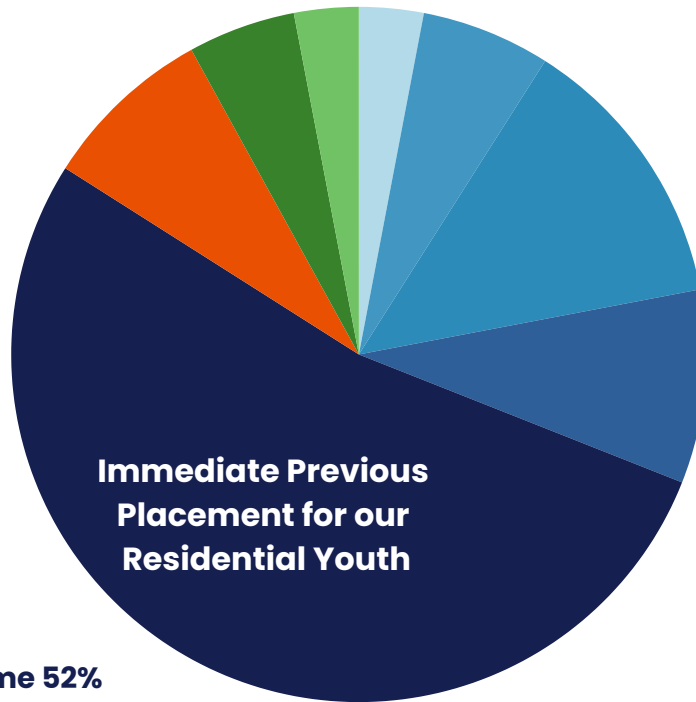


A Beacon in the Storm

Our Reach:



- 31% Douglas
- 21% Johnson
- 14% Shawnee
- 15% Wyandotte
- 19% Other



Home 52%

PPC 9%

Group Home 13%

Foster Home 6%

Acute Care 3%

PRTF 3%

Secure Care 5%

Other 8%

Youth came to us from counties across Kansas and from a range of prior placements—for example, group homes, foster care disruptions, and emergency removals. No matter their path, they arrived to find a calm, consistent space. O'Connell stands as a steady presence in moments of crisis.

207

A Home for Every Story

This year, O'Connell Children's Shelter provided care and stability for over 200 youth in emergency and long-term placements.

Every day, we provide more than a bed—we provide belief in what's next.

Support for Every Journey

From long-term placements to short-term respite care to urgent police protective custody (PPC) stays, O'Connell serves youth with a wide range of needs. Our ability to support different acuity levels ensures that no matter the reason they arrive, every young person receives care tailored to their experience. Flexibility with compassion is our standard.

2024 TOTAL
19,128

DAYS OF CARE



Longterm Care

100

Youth

186

avg. days of care

15.3

avg. age of youth

Crisis Care (PPC)

107

Youth

3.8

avg. days of care

14.6

avg. age of youth

Respite

29

Youth

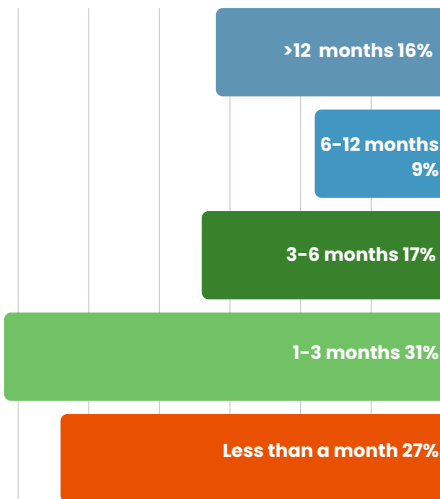
3.7

avg. days of care

13.9

avg. age of youth

Milestones that Matter

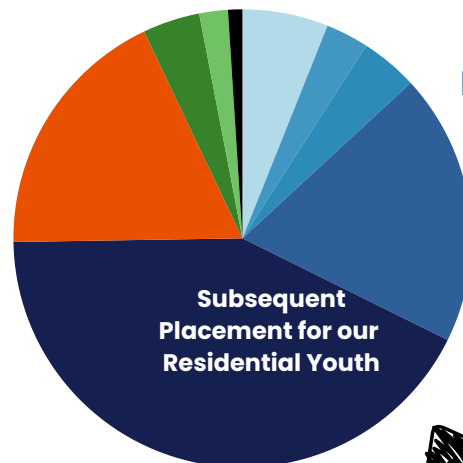


Length of stay is not just measured in days—it is measured in birthdays celebrated, jobs started, and holidays made special. Many youth remain with us long enough to mark meaningful personal milestones, and we work to make sure every moment is intentional.



Leaving with Purpose

When youth leave O'Connell, they leave with a plan, a support network, and a renewed sense of direction. Whether transitioning to a new placement, reuniting with family, or stepping toward independence, we ensure their next steps are taken with hope and intention. Every exit is treated like a beginning.



- Home 42%**
- Remained with OCS 19%**
- Group Home 4%**
- Foster Home 3%**
- Acute Care 6%**
- Independent Living 1%**
- PRTF 2%**
- Secure Care 4%**
- Other 18%**



Kickstart your holiday season at

Festival of Trees

In 2024 at the 38th annual Lawrence Festival of Trees, O'Connell Children's Shelter raised an unprecedented \$250,000—the most funds in the event's history—thanks to the generosity of over 500 attendees, 60+ decorated trees, 25+ gorgeous wreaths, a handful of marvelous gingerbread creations, and spirited community support.

These contributions directly benefit our programs—supporting residential care, prevention efforts in Douglas County and beyond, and helping more youth and families find stability and hope. We're already well-underway planning this year's event where we hope to raise the fundraising bar even higher!

Please join us: This year's Festival will run from Friday, November 28 to Sunday, December 7 at Maceli's Banquet Hall. The highly anticipated auction party will be held on Saturday, December 6.

If you're interested in participating in this year's Festival of Trees, either by being a sponsor, volunteering during the events, or creating and donating a holiday display, please reach out to Maren at marenl@oconnellcs.org.

Mark Your Calendars!

Festival runs from Nov. 28 to Dec. 7 at Maceli's which is located at 1031 New Hampshire St.





IN SIX YEARS

\$38,507

**HAS BEEN RAISED FOR
O'CONNELL PREVENTION**



Activities

- Car Show
- Autumn Grace Memorial Kid Zone
- Live Music
- Concessions by Set 'Em Up Jack's

**Partnering with
Lawrence Blue Santa**

Prevention Fundraising Big Event

About

Summer's End Cruise In began as a shared vision between Dan Koehn, owner of Set 'Em Up Jack's, and the Harmon family: a way to combine community fun with meaningful impact. Since 2019, this event has proudly served as an annual fundraiser specifically for O'Connell Children's Shelter's Prevention Department, supporting programs that strengthen families before crisis strikes.

What started as a simple idea has grown into a Lawrence tradition—drawing over 100 unique vehicles, live music, family-friendly activities, and great food every second Saturday in September. In 2025, we'll celebrate 14 years of this incredible event, which has raised over \$100,000 in support of prevention-focused services.

For our team, this event is more than a fundraiser—it's a statement of belief in early intervention. Every dollar raised helps us keep families together, connect youth to vital support, and deliver housing, employment, and parenting resources when they're needed most. Summer's End is a powerful reminder that prevention thrives when community leads the way.



Join Us For This Year's Fun!

**September 13, 2025
10 am - 3 pm
Broken Arrow Park**

Thank you to our 2024 Donors



500 Road Farm and Friends
Acacia Lodge No. 9
Addyson McKenna
Advantage Heating & Air Conditioning
Alan & Yvonne Garcia
Alice Kelly
Alison Kossover-Ackermann & Russ Ackermann
Allworth Financial
Allyn Denning
Allyson & Mark Crowl
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Amy Gallagher
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Andrew Holt
Andy & Bette Carriger
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Angela Treanor
Angie & Jim Evers
Angie Rexroad
Animal Hospital of Lawrence
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Anonymous
Ashley Fry
Ashley Quick
Audra Fussell
Auto-Owners Insurance
Bank Midwest
Barbara Seaver
Bartlett & West
Beckmeisters
Becky Cheek-King
Bess of Hardwicke Chapter of DBE
Betty Loucks & Jack Robison
Bill & Brenda Schuelteis
Bird Physical Therapy
Bishop Seabury Academy
Blake & Kristen Hedges
BlueCross BlueShield of Kansas
BNI-River City Referrals
Bob & Deb Grunst
Bob Garcia
Bobby & Debbie Jones
Bonnie Johnson
Bradley Fienkeldei
Brandon & Andrea Graham
Brenda & Bill Schulteis
Brendan & Caroline French
Brent Fry
Brian Walter & Debra Wulf-Walter
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Brooke & Marshall Greve
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Christina & Mark Demetree
Clara Groene
Claudia King
Colette & Ben Bloch
Colleen Bloom
Colleen Himmelberg
Community Connections at Pinckney
Coneflower Consulting
Connie & Ryan Grimes
Cory & Elaine Hendrickson
Cottonwood, Inc., CORE Dept.
Courtney Cyzman
Corpus Christi Catholic Parish
Crouch Recreation
C-Tran at Community Connections, USD 497
Cyndi & John Lombardo
Cyndi Swall
Cynthia Blair
Dan Schriener
Dana Cummins
Dani Erker
Danielle Davey
Danielle Haverkamp
Danielle Hugunin
Darcey Soto
David & Kathleen Britton
David Schwabauer
Deanell & John Tacha
Debbie Mudrock
Debbie Van Saun
Debby Durham Family Foundation
Deborah Ahlert-Caffey
Deborah Meyer
Debra Grunst
Denise & Jeff Cyzman
Diana Ice
Diana Korbe
Diane Owen
Dianna Dykes
Douglas County Behavior Health Court
Drew Burkhart
Dynelle & Rodney Kessler
Eagles 2700 (Ottawa)
Edmonds Duncan
Elise Heger
Emily Cope
Emily Farley
Emily Hartz
Emily Willis Stewart & John Stewart
Eric & Pamela Huerter
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Erin Maigaard & Ashley Zeller
Erin Smith-Bird
Erin Wyatt
First State Bank & Trust
Four Leaf Clover 4H Club
Free State Financial Group
Free State IPS
Gale Haslam
Gina Meier-Hummel & Mark Hummel
Gina Pacumbaba-Watson
Gina Vinyard
Girl Scouts of Douglas Co., S.U. #716
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Grandstand
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Jane Butler
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Janis Bunker
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Jean Shepherd
Jefferson's Restaurant
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Jennifer & Paul Werner
Jennifer Jones & Michelle Nickerson
Jennifer Oldridge
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Jennifer Sheldon-Sherman
Jerry & Jess Johnson
Jesse Cortez & Barbara Anderson
Jill Goldman
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Jim & Ginny O'Connell
Jingle Belles
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Joe Hardy
John & Kathy Rathbun
John Bradley
John Connolly
John Lombardo
John Schmiedeler
John Tucker
Josie Polk
Judy & Tim Keller
Justin & Loree Cordova

Thank you to our 2024 Donors

Kaitlin McAleese
Kansas Women's Rugby Club
Karen & Todd Andregg
Karen Bayouth
Karen Hill
Karla Menaugh
Kate & Marc White
Kate Desche & Casey Bowman
Katelyn Hockey
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Lawrence Pi Beta Phi Alumnae Club
Lawrence Rotary Club
Lawrence Women's Network
Lawson Flores
Linda Frost
Lisa Patterson
LMH Health
Lori & Tim Arnold
Maceli's Banquet Hall & Catering
Maggie Sparke, Kacie Kneidel, &
Justin Lohrmeyer
Malani Kuiper
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Maren Ludwig
Margaret Holdeman
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Marlou Wegener
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Matt Klein & Katie Winter
Matthew Brush
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Melanie Yoder
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Meritrust Credit Union
Meryl Carver-Allmond & Blaine Allmond
Michael & Kim Rack
Michael & Sarah Randolph
Michael & Sue Willoughby
Michele Bennett
Mindy Alexander & George Grieb
Mitzie Gimblet
Molly & Monte Soukup
Murray-MacFarland Family
Nancy Harness
Nancy Jones
Nanette Baker
Nick Gideon
Nick Schmiedeler
Owen's Flower Shop & Jane Cotitta
P1 Group, Inc
Pam & Kevin Lewis
Party Vibes: Balloons & Party Design
Paul Werner Architects
Pendleton's Country Market
Philip McKnight
Pioneer Ridge
Prairie Moon Waldorf School
Professional Moving & Storage
Rainbow Strings for the Lawrence Community
Rebecca Sudja
Reese & Sara Jones
Reese Hays
Rheva Victor Drummond & Kay Traver
Richard King
Richard Renner
Risley Chiropractic
Rob Shapiro
Robert & Brenda Skaggs
Robert Wilson
Robin & Rick Ludwig
Roseanne Smith
Rowan & Demory Taylor
Roxanne Mettenbrink
Ruth DeWitt
Ryan Sparke
Sabatini Architects
Sally Hare-Schriner & Tim Schriner
Sally Williams
Sam Porritt
Sandy Brown
Sara Nelson
Sarah Turnbull
Scott Temperature

Seaboard Foundation
Set 'Em Up Jack's
Sew Forth Alterations
Shadow Spooner
Sheree Miller & Benjamin Poff
Sherri Johnston
Sherri Loveland
Silver Lake Bank
Sloan Law Firm
Social Service League of Lawrence, KS
Solomon & Associates
Soto & Clements Families
Sporting Kaw Valley
SSC CPAs + Advisors
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Standard Beverage
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Stephens Real Estate
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Stevens & Brand, LLP
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McGrew Real Estate
Sunflower Thrifters
Susan & Kevin Stuever
Susan Andersen
Susan Buchanan
Susan Gile
Susan Hazlett
Susan Sloyer
Sydnie Germany
Tami Wise
Tanya Parr
Taylor Lang & Quinn Neuenswander
Teresa Kempf
The Gazebo Girls
The Glitter Girls: Lee Beth Dever, Diane
Knapp, & Cindy Self
The Roark Group
The Smith Family & Lawrence Model RR Club
Tim Arnold
Tim Mock
Timothy Harries
Torrez & Debbie Dawson
Travis & Hope Blankenship
Trinity Episcopal Church Anchor Women
Truity Credit Union
Tyler Cummins
UMB
Uplift Coffee
Vanessa Whalen
VCondra Counseling, LLC
Vicki Vormehr
Wanda Breeden
Wes Smith
William & Mary Perkins
Wint & Mary Winter
Yvonne Klinksick

Help Hope Take Root



At O'Connell, we believe that the work we do is not simply a program—it's a promise. A promise to show up early, to stand with families through challenges, and to believe that every child deserves a future built on stability, not survival. *But we can't do it alone.*

Volunteer!

Work with us! We need volunteers in many programs. Mentors are welcome. Share a passion or skill with a young person. Help a young family navigate life's challenges.

Email us at info@oconnellcs.org to find out more.

Partner with Us

Are you a school, agency, court, or community organization? Let's collaborate to make prevention seamless. Contact us to explore partnership opportunities.

Email Erin Harmon at erinh@oconnellcs.org.

Become a Foster Parent

Interested in learning more about being a force of stability in a young person's life, contact Jamie Engnehl at jamiee@oconnellcs.org to find out how to become a foster parent.

Share Our Message

Spread the word: Whether you're a teacher, neighbor, business owner, or advocate—your voice helps youth and families find their way to us.

Follow our social channels on Facebook and Instagram!

Help Us Grow!

Your donation supports therapy, case management, job readiness, housing stability, and more. Give today and help a family stay together tomorrow.

Give today and help a child celebrate an important milestone!

Visit oconnellchildrensshelter.org or scan the qr code below to donate!

