

LifeLines

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safer, healthier relationships
for children and families

There's No Place Like Home

Written by Angela Kwasny, Foster Care Recruitment Specialist, FamilyForward

Throughout life, we encounter times when we must step outside of our comfort zone and be away from home. Whether we're off at college, on vacation, or spending time with family and friends, the thrill of new experiences often fills us with excitement. However, it's common to reach a moment when we start to feel homesick and think, "There's no place like home." Even though we can't click our heels like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* to instantly return to our cozy beds, we still have the comfort of knowing that we'll be back home soon.

Now, imagine what it's like to be a child in foster care. They often long to be back home, in a familiar environment, but—through no fault of their own—no matter how hard they "click their heels," returning home is not an option.

When children enter foster care, they have lost so much and face overwhelming uncertainty. Standing at the doorstep of a family they have never met, they are expected to trust that these strangers will provide the safety and stability they did not have before.

In 2023, Missouri saw 12,790 children enter foster care, with 1,500 needing permanent homes. Meanwhile, the last recorded number of licensed foster homes in the state was 4,567 in 2022—a number that has been steadily declining. As the number of children requiring temporary care continues to rise, the demand for safe and nurturing homes remains critical until long-term solutions can be established.

The decision to become a foster parent is not an easy one, but it is undoubtedly one of the most impactful roles you can take on. Research shows that it takes just one caring adult to help a child become a success story.

Becoming a licensed foster parent is just one way to make a difference. There are many other opportunities to positively impact the lives of children in foster care. If you would like more information on how you can help, please email Angie Kwasny, Foster Care Recruitment Specialist, at angela.kwasny@familyforwardmo.org.



OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY CORNER

Written by Juliet Thomas, OTS, and Ashley Wagner, OTD, OTR/L

Empowering Transitions

Occupational Therapy's Role in Supporting Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

Growing up and moving out on our own can be a daunting experience. Managing finances, maintaining a daily routine, navigating jobs, and taking care of a home can all feel overwhelming. For youth in foster care, this transition to adulthood often brings additional uncertainty and fear as they lose the support of the child welfare system.

Many young people in foster care feel unprepared to navigate life on their own. The transition to adulthood—combined with the loss of services and connections to case managers—can be intimidating. Before they age out of foster care, it is crucial to equip them with the skills and confidence needed for independent living and long-term success.

How Occupational Therapy Supports Youth in Transition

Occupational therapy (OT) is a therapeutic service that helps individuals problem-solve barriers, develop skills, and adjust their environments or routines to achieve personal goals and enhance overall well-being. At FamilyForward, our occupational therapists specialize in understanding how trauma and adversity impact learning, sensory regulation, and social comfort. Using this expertise, we help teens in foster care build confidence in essential independent living skills, including education, employment, health management, financial literacy, and social engagement.

Through hands-on, therapeutic experiences, OT provides youth with opportunities to practice real-life independent living scenarios that may not always be available in foster homes. Occupational therapists also offer coaching to help teens plan for and navigate life after foster care, problem-solve challenges, and prepare for the unexpected.

With a holistic and client-centered approach, FamilyForward's occupational therapists collaborate with youth to address skills they identify as priorities. Key focus areas include:



Independent Living Skills

- ▶ Planning meals that meet their sensory, cultural, and nutritional needs.
- ▶ Budgeting for groceries and practicing safe food preparation and storage.
- ▶ Designing and maintaining a living space that reflects their identity and supports mental well-being.
- ▶ Paying bills on time and managing debt effectively.
- ▶ Creating a daily schedule to balance obligations and self-care.

Continuing Education & Career Preparation

- ▶ Establishing routines and organizational strategies for success in school or the workplace.
- ▶ Developing regulation techniques to stay calm during job interviews.
- ▶ Practicing interview skills, including asking questions to determine if a job is the right fit.

Social Skills & Community Integration

- ▶ Finding social opportunities that align with their interests and comfort level.
- ▶ Learning to navigate public transportation to increase social and work opportunities.
- ▶ Identifying safety strategies for different social situations.

Health & Wellness

- ▶ Practicing how to schedule medical appointments and communicate with healthcare providers.
- ▶ Managing medications and understanding prescriptions.
- ▶ Increasing health literacy to recognize physical and mental health needs and seek appropriate professional support.

No matter what area of independent living a teen and their caregivers want to strengthen, FamilyForward's occupational therapists are here to support them during this critical transition. Our hands-on approach to skill development, combined with a holistic understanding of how each teen's unique identity shapes their goals, helps build confidence for the journey into adulthood.

To connect with occupational therapy services, reach out to your foster care case manager or any current FamilyForward provider.





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Our Vision

FamilyForward leads the community in providing innovative solutions for advancing safer, healthier relationships for children and families.

Our Mission

FamilyForward moves vulnerable children in the direction of hope by delivering comprehensive therapeutic and educational services to support biological, foster, and adoptive families.

Visit familyforwardmo.org/publications to read LifeLines online.

Educational Opportunities for Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Parents

All in-person classes will be held at FamilyForward's Developmental Trauma Center located at 11358 Van Cleve Ave in St. Louis County. *Light refreshments will be provided.*

Core Teen Training

Tuesday, April 8, 2025 | 6:00-8:00 pm

In an effort to keep youth with higher needs in families, resource parents must have specialized knowledge and skills. The development of effective trauma-informed and culturally responsive training will reduce the risk of placement disruptions and increase permanency options. The classroom content is intended to increase the knowledge and skills of those who will be parenting teens with moderate to severe emotional and behavioral needs. The interactive content includes lectures, videos, activities, and discussions. It provides many opportunities for participants to learn from each other while building their knowledge.

Collaborative and Proactive Solutions

Wednesday, April 23, 2025 | 6:00-8:30 pm

Formerly known as Collaborative Problem Solving, this approach, developed by Dr. Ross Greene, is based on the assumption that children do well if they can. By viewing challenging behavior as a deficit in cognitive skills—specifically in the domains of flexibility/adaptability, frustration tolerance, and problem-solving—parents can view their child with empathy. Parents practice the three steps of collaborative problem solving: the Empathy Step, the Define the Problem Step, and the Invitation Step.

Spaulding/Adoption Training

Monday, April 28, May 5, 12, and 19, 2025 | 6:00-9:00 p.m.

This training is a twelve-hour course that provides families with the tools and information they need to understand the Missouri adoption process. The training is facilitated by an experienced adoptive parent and a child welfare professional. All sessions **MUST** be completed as a requirement for licensure to adopt. More than one absence will require the attendee to start the training over. Please contact Jack.C.Rosenburg@dss.mo.gov or Khirsten.B.Miller@dss.mo.gov for information and registration.

Managing Placement Transitions

Tuesday, May 6, 2025 | 6:00-8:30 pm

This theme provides an overview of the impact transitions, both planned and unplanned, have on children who have experienced trauma, loss or separation. The theme discusses strategies parents can use to make these transitions less traumatic and disruptive. Strategies for making children feel welcomed and connected before, during, and after transitions occur are shared.

The Amazing Brain

Wednesday, May 14, 2025 | 6:00-8:30 pm

This training will provide parents with a deeper understanding of brain development from the moment of conception to maturation. The impact of early childhood trauma on the brain's organization will be explored through a small group activity utilizing The Brain Architecture Game. Will your team be able to build a brain that stands up to toxic stress?

Show ME Healthy Kids: MO Healthy Kids Presentation, Mary Mogg, MSW (Virtual)

Tuesdays: May 20 or June 17, 2025 | 6:00-8:00 pm

Show Me Healthy Kids offers several benefits that you may not know about, such as earning money for well-care doctor visits, transportation services for birth parents to visit their children, and free sensory kits for some children. Get help navigating the healthcare system so members can get the treatments and benefits they need.

Healthy Relationships

Tuesday, June 10, 2025 | 6:00-8:30 pm

Children in the foster care system often have not had healthy relationships modeled for them within their families of origin. They may have witnessed domestic violence, inappropriate familial and peer relationships, and experienced violations of their bodies, which distort their understanding of what is or is not appropriate in relationships. Exploring topics that may be difficult for adults to discuss with children and teens is the starting point for becoming comfortable with the subject matter. Developing healthy self-respect is the foundation for future healthy relationships, and as their caregivers, we must engage our children in ongoing conversations.

MO C.A.R.E.

Mondays: June 16, 23, 30, July 7, 14, 21, 28, and August 4, 11, 18, 2025 | 6:00-9:00 pm

Preservice training is required of any individual wishing to be licensed as a foster parent through the state of Missouri. Please contact Jack.C.Rosenburg@dss.mo.gov or Khirsten.B.Miller@dss.mo.gov for information and registration.

Film and Discussion: *Foster*

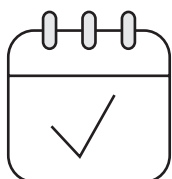
Virtual: Wednesday, June 18, 2025 | 6:00-9:00 pm

Foster is a documentary that gives glimpses of the lives of those who are actively involved with the Los Angeles County child welfare system. The film is told from the point of view of parents who have had children removed, children who have been removed, children involved with the juvenile justice system, foster parents, mentors, and advocates. During this review we will facilitate a guided discussion of the themes and issues addressed in the film. Training is credited to 3 hours.

Film and Discussion: *Paper Tigers*

Wednesday, June 25, 2025 | 6:00-8:30 pm

This educational opportunity involves viewing of the film *Paper Tigers*, a documentary about Lincoln High School, a pioneer in advancing trauma sensitive responses to the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences in the lives of its students. A guided discussion will allow viewers the opportunity to process themes highlighted in the film and the role that having a responsive educational team plays in the long-term outcomes for children with a history of trauma.



REGISTER FOR TRAINING

Call: 314.534.9350 ext. 7234

Email: intake.dept@familyforwardmo.org



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