

Written Testimony for Special Committee  
on Foster Care Adequacy  
November 17, 2015

CarePortal  
*A division of:*  
**THE GLOBAL ORPHAN PROJECT**  
6114 N. 9 Highway  
Parkville, MO 64152



Chairman Knox and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your investment of time, resources and commitment to improving the foster care system in Kansas. We are grateful for the opportunity to speak with this committee and share with you our heart and our approach to empowering local churches to meet the needs of those involved in the child welfare system in this state.

My name is Tate Williams, and I am the State Director of CarePortal for Kansas and Missouri. I am joined by Adrien Lewis, the Executive Director of CarePortal. Adrien and I are not only professionally invested in this dialogue, but our families are personally involved as licensed foster care providers in our communities.

I want to begin by acknowledging the work of The Department for Children and Families (DCF) and its 2 lead contractors: KVC and St. Francis. These agencies and leadership are often criticized and seldom applauded. Unlike so many in our communities, they are consistently on the front lines of fighting for the dignity of families in the midst of crisis and the care of children and youth who have been abused and neglected. On behalf of the Church in this State, I want to say a big “Thank You!”

### **Introduction**

*CarePortal is an interdenominational network of churches throughout the US that are collaborating with their local child welfare stakeholders for the benefit of at-risk children and families in their community.* CarePortal is a division of The Global Orphan Project (“GO Project”), an international ministry based in Kansas City, MO. All of GO Project’s efforts to transform lives through the care of at-risk families, children, and youth in the US is accomplished under the CarePortal umbrella. CarePortal develops private donations from business, churches and individuals to begin work in new communities. Participating churches are invited to sustain CarePortal by contributing \$100/month. GO Project will at no point seek government funding or a government contract to catalyze or sustain CarePortal. It is provided at no cost to DCF and DCF’s contractors.

*I want to take this opportunity to briefly answer the following questions:*

- *Why is CarePortal active in Kansas?*
- *Where in Kansas is CarePortal active?*
- *What do CarePortal Churches do?*
- *How do CarePortal Churches stay involved?*

Our hope is that this brief introduction will inspire an ongoing dialogue between the legislature and representatives of the CarePortal Team for the sake of deeper collaboration as we all work for a Kansas where children and youth are protected and families are strengthened.

## Why is CarePortal active in Kansas?

In Kansas, there are 4,615 churches<sup>1</sup>, representing 100,000's of individuals and families. Recent reports indicate the number of children in the foster care system is at an all-time high, exceeding 6,500<sup>2</sup>. If each of the local churches in the state was engaged in some way with 1 or 2 of the children or youth in care, every child and youth in Kansas and the families that care for them would have the support of a local church. We propose that this level of involvement from local churches would fundamentally change the local church in positive ways and would measurably change the child welfare system in this State. *Our vision is that every local church in Kansas would have the opportunity to do a little to care for at-risk families and children in their community.* We believe that CarePortal represents the most effective approach to mobilizing local churches to engage.

## Where in Kansas is CarePortal Active?

As of the date of the special committee, there are approximately 500 churches enrolled in the CarePortal Network in Kansas, Missouri, Texas, Oklahoma, North Carolina, and Arizona. *In Kansas, 56 churches in nine counties, including Wyandotte, Johnson, Reno, Rice, Stafford, McPherson, Kingman, Harvey, and Barton are participating in the CarePortal Network.*

## What do CarePortal Churches do?

Historically, churches have been viewed as a potential pool of fostering and adopting families. Although foster care and adoption are significant needs, the reality is that fostering and adopting are just two out of hundreds of ways for individuals to be involved with the needs of the families, children and youth that are touched by the child welfare system in this State. *Everything that CarePortal churches do can be found somewhere on this grid:*

	Prevention	Foster Care	Adoption	Transition
<b>TIER 1</b> Physical <i>Invest In</i>				
<b>TIER 2</b> Relational <i>Walk With</i>				
<b>TIER 3</b> Family <i>Become Home</i>				

<sup>1</sup> Data obtained from the non-profit entity Focus on the Family at the following address:  
<http://icareaboutorphans.org/consideringadoption/waitingkidsinyourstate/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.kshb.com/news/state/kansas/more-children-than-ever-before-are-in-the-foster-care-system-in-kansas>

- *Tier 1* represents physical investments (cash, goods, or services) by CarePortal Churches to stabilize the environments for children or youth and their caregivers. In some instances, the provision of specific needs prevents children and youth from being removed from the home. In other cases, physical investments allow certain individuals to participate as foster or adoptive parents, to keep their relative children in their care, or to provide assistance to youth aging out of the foster care system.

She expressed incredible gratitude and churches were thankful for the opportunity to meet her family. Churches have continued to support the family outside of the child welfare system, offering gift cards and transportation help.

-Hallie Cable, CarePortal Manager in Reno County

- *Tier 2* needs represent relational opportunities for CarePortal Churches to mobilize and strengthen families or support youth. These relational opportunities can come in the form of programs (example: The Strengthening Families Program (SFP)), mentoring/tutoring or simply helping with normal life tasks as a friend or community support (babysitting, or helping with transportation, etc.).

*I am so grateful to SFP and how the program has reconnected my daughter and myself. The program teaches families that have had issues how to be stronger and be a family again. I lost a lot of important years with her and SFP has helped me communicate with her and how to be her mom again.*

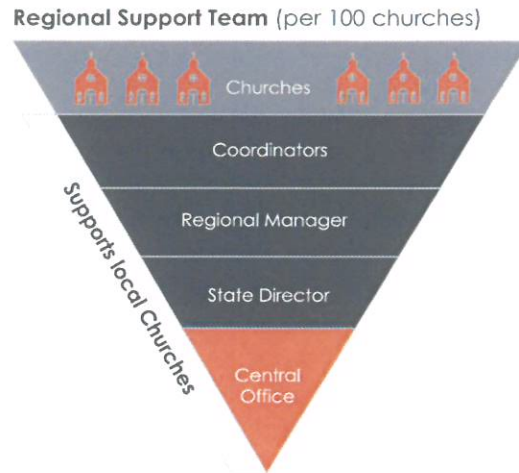
-Chantel, a participant in SFP led by a CarePortal church in Olathe

- *Tier 3* needs represent those needs requiring CarePortal Churches to mobilize individuals to welcome strangers into their homes. This includes partnering with preventative initiatives like Safe Families, developing resources for youth in PPC (Protective Homes), or working alongside organizations that license foster families and adoptive homes.

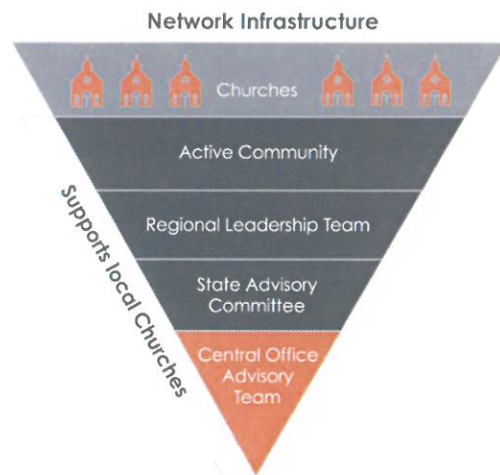
**How do CarePortal Churches stay involved?**

Sustained engagement of the local churches requires a massive grassroots mobilization effort. *CarePortal Churches stay involved through a team of volunteers and staff, an organized network, and a dynamic technology that catalyzes engagement on a daily basis.*

- Support Team:* Every participating CarePortal Church designates a point person to keep their church connected. Each point person is supported by a Coordinator who supports up to 10 churches. Each Coordinator is supported by a Regional Manager. Regional Managers are staff on the CarePortal Team and support up to 10 Coordinators. Regional Managers are supported by a State Director, who in turn is supported by our Central Office.



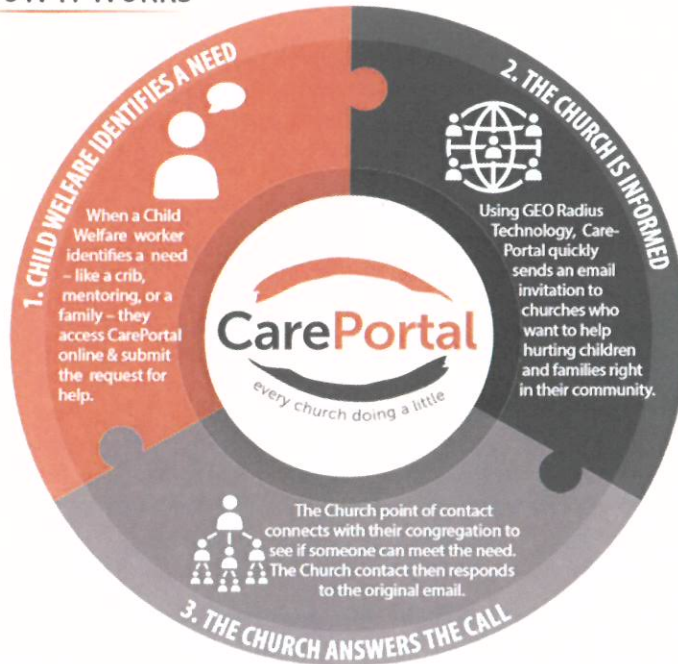
- Network:* Collaboration, not programs, is the key to the CarePortal's effectiveness. This collaboration is achieved through a dynamic network that it is organized by each team member. Coordinators meet with representatives from their 10 churches on a monthly basis. Managers lead Regional Councils where representatives from partnering agencies and the participating churches meet on a quarterly basis. The State Directors participates in regular meetings with the Faith Based and



Communities Initiative office at DCF and their regular statewide initiatives. Our Central Office has an advisory board comprised of ministers, business leaders, and state leaders that provides system-wide direction.

- *Technology:* CarePortal leverages a technological platform that enables child welfare professionals from participating agencies to quickly communicate with participating churches by inputting a need and the technology generates requests to churches based on their proximity to the zip code of the need.

## HOW IT WORKS



Since March of 2015, this technology has been used by KVC and St. Francis to communicate over 200 requests. Participating churches have successfully met over 65% of those requests. Currently the technology is being used exclusively to communicate Tier 1 needs (cash, goods, or services), but the CarePortal Team is currently in discussions with DCF and its contractors about utilizing this technology to communicate Tier 2 needs (mentoring, tutoring, etc.).

### Conclusion

CarePortal leadership believes that, through consistent collaboration, the government can fulfill its mandate to protect children and the church can fulfill its mandate to care for them. The CarePortal allows the Church and the State to collaborate on behalf of the most vulnerable in every community. We are excited to work to provide every local church in Kansas with the opportunity to care for at-risk families and children in their communities throughout the State.

Thank you for your time,

Tate Williams,

CarePortal State Director for Kansas and Missouri

## A Pastor's Perspective

*Dear leaders of the churches in Kansas City,*

*My name is Jim West, and I serve as the Lead Pastor at Colonial. I regret that I cannot be with you today to personally share my passion for the Care Portal and our growing ministry among the foster/adopt world in our city, so allow me to send my thoughts through a brief letter.*

*You would not be sitting in this meeting if God had not already placed the plight of the orphan on your heart. Clearly scripture reveals God's love for the fatherless as well as all the children, to whom belong the Kingdom of God. Caring for kids is always Kingdom obedience, and the Care Portal is one aspect of that obedience.*

*In addition to the practical care the Portal brings to families and children, I am excited about this ministry for other reasons as well.*

*First, CarePortal is a groundbreaking avenue of cooperation between church and state. In a time when the church has lost favor in the culture, the Care Portal is quietly building trust between state agencies and the local church. We are "earning our voice" through acts of generosity and compassion. We are also discovering that God has many of His people serving in state offices, and our presence through CarePortal is very encouraging to them.*

*Second, CarePortal fosters cross-congregational cooperation. No single congregation can hope to fill the needs of so many struggling families in need. Together, however, we as the Church in Kansas City represent the endless resources of the God we worship. I hope CarePortal will be the first of many avenues that the church can cooperate together on a larger scale for the glory of God.*

*Third, CarePortal makes a clear statement: we claim these children and these families for the Kingdom of God. We take responsibility to raise fatherless children and to serve fostering families...that is our job and our opportunity, and we do not expect the state to raise fatherless children or bless families who are taking in children, though we value the service of the state and we want to encourage them by coming alongside and doing our part.*

*Fourth, CarePortal provides meaningful ways for church families to engage in the world of foster/adoption even if they are not sensing God's call to foster and adopt. Christy and I have four kids—one in high school, one in middle school, one in elementary school, and one in preschool. I have a big job and our lives are crazy...we simply do not sense God calling us to adopt at this time. However, we are preparing to donate our minivan to a family in need. In fact, I spent \$2400 to replace the air-conditioning in our old van this summer because I did not want to donate a van without air conditioning to a family in need...it was counterintuitive, but it's the least we can do to help in the foster/adopt window when God is not yet calling us to foster/adopt. I also value that CarePortal provides an open door for "family to family" connections...in other words, Christy and I could deliver the van ourselves to a family in need, thus beginning a relationship with that family (if we choose to do so...it's not required).*

*Finally, I love that CarePortal provides a tangible way for people to be introduced to the Global Orphan Project. Colonial has been involved with GOP since it's creation, and many of the leaders are people we know well. From top to bottom Global Orphan Project is a Christ-centered, Kingdom honoring organization led by brilliant people who are ALL IN for the glory of God. The GOP now has four of Colonial's brightest and best serving on staff, and I suspect there will be more in the future. When I see these highly gifted leaders committing themselves to this organization, it says a lot about the organization and its mission. I'm a big fan, and I feel confident that anyone who spends much time with the GOP leaders will feel the same way.*

*Thanks for the opportunity to share, and please pray that all the churches in our city would engage in the Care Portal for God's glory and the benefit of His children.*

*With unfailing hope,*

*Jim West*

*Sr. Pastor at Colonial Presbyterian Church in Kansas City*