Bios

Denise Cross

**President and CEO of Cornerstones of Care**

Responsible for setting strategic direction for the organization, advocacy, financial stability and growth. Oversees the implementation and execution of corporate policies. Represents the organization at local, state, and national levels, advocating for greater resources and services for children and families.

**Experience**

Harvard School of Government Executive Leadership Program

University of Missouri, Columbia – Bachelor of psychology and child/family development

2014 Class of Influential Women – *KC Business Magazine*

2003 Child Advocate Award – Community Partnerships for Protecting Children

Denise has served at the helm of Cornerstones of Care since 2007. Like others in the organization, her career began with the Missouri Department of Social Services. During her 20 years there, Denise served as director of the Family Support Division, director of Family Services, and deputy director of the Division of Medical Services. As the director of Family Services, Denise was responsible for 5,600 employees in 115 counties and an annual budget of $1 billion.

**From Denise**

As a society we are more inclined to fix a problem than prevent one. If we shifted our focus in child welfare and became more proactive about helping families be successful, it would go a long way in reducing the need for foster care. In the meantime, I feel that my purpose in life is to provide a voice to children and families who are unable to advocate for themselves.

Ryan Dowis

**Chief Operating Officer and Vice President of Cornerstones of Care**

Oversees programming, human resources, professional development, and quality assurance initiatives. Fosters community partnerships. In his own words, “removes barriers to high-quality service delivery and creates innovative solutions to meet community needs.”

**Experience**

University of Missouri, Kansas City – Master of social work

Northwest Missouri State University – Bachelor of Science: comprehensive psychology/sociology

Surrounded by a family of educators who dedicated their lives to helping others, Ryan developed a passion for service early on. He began his career with Youth Services International Inc. and then moved to the Missouri Division of Family Services where he worked in child abuse/neglect investigations, foster care, and adoptions. In 2002, Ryan joined Cornerstones of Care and was instrumental in the development, start-up, and operation of its foster care and adoption services program. When Ryan has time, he is also an adjunct instructor at UMKC teaching child welfare courses.

**From Ryan**

I have great compassion for the older youths “aging out” of the foster care system. These children became our responsibility—society’s responsibility—once the decision was made that they couldn’t live safely with their parents.

We have an obligation to provide them with opportunities for a successful life. In my opinion, one of those opportunities is a college education. That’s something I’m passionate about.
Lisa London

Vice President of Programs

Oversees the six programs within Cornerstones of Care, including Foster Care and Adoption Case Management and Resource Development.

Experience

University of Kansas – Master in social work
Texas Tech University – Bachelor of Science, human development and family studies

Before joining Cornerstones in 2010, Lisa worked for the Missouri Children’s Division (previously Division of Family Services). Starting as a foster care case manager, Lisa dedicated the next 14 years to the division and to families in need, finishing as the program development specialist for the western half of Missouri.

From Lisa

I am passionate about children receiving every opportunity available to them and helping them reach their highest potential. My biggest challenge is getting others to share that passion.

The boys and girls in our system have experienced trauma from abuse and neglect. The effects of which can be devastating and permanent. It’s heart-rending. I dream of a time when people care about and support the families within their communities. A time when families in need receive assistance before they reach a point of despair because that despair leads to abuse and neglect. Ideally, children should never experience trauma in their own home.

Shelia Rancatore

Director of Resource Development

Oversees and manages all aspects of finding homes for foster and adoptive children, including recruitment, training, licensure, and support/retention of resource parents.

Experience

University of Missouri – Master in social work
University of Central Missouri – Bachelor of Science in social work

Shelia has been with Cornerstones of Care since the fall of 2013. Although comparatively new to the organization, she has worked with children and their families since 1991. With Cornerstones, Shelia has come full circle, working first with the Missouri Division of Family Services and now taking on the same responsibilities in a privatized setting.

From Shelia

Every child deserves to grow up in a home that is safe and nurturing. It’s the foundation of everything … a child’s self-esteem, sense of fairness, responsibility, work ethic, inner growth, trust … everything. As a society, we need to ensure that our children have every opportunity to succeed.

Unfortunately, in Northwest Missouri there is a tremendous need for foster/adoptive parents. My goal is to increase the number of homes eligible to receive placements. With more homes, we’d be able to find the perfect fit for each child and family, and we’d be able to decrease the number of children in each home.

Bios
Cornerstones of Care

- Doesn’t the state of Missouri handle foster care and adoptions?
  Yes, it does. The Children’s Division, which is part of the Missouri Department of Social Services, is responsible for foster care and adoptions. However, in Northwest Missouri, the state has contracted with Cornerstones of Care to provide those services on its behalf.

- Is foster care and adoption privatized throughout Missouri?
  No, only in the 30 counties of Northwest Missouri. The contract between Cornerstones and the state of Missouri is considered a pilot program because of its unique breadth of services. Services include:
  - Initial training and licensure of resource parents and homes.
  - Supporting and maintaining the foster homes throughout their licensure.
  - Relicensing homes.
  - Finding foster homes for children.

Although Missouri has contracted with private agencies throughout the state for a number of years, the contracts have been less extensive. For the most part, those agencies have provided only training and home studies. The Children’s Division has remained the licensing entity and the responsible party for maintaining the homes and conducting license renewals every two years. That’s what makes the Cornerstones contract unique.

- In what regions does Healthy Families provide foster care and adoption service?
  We recruit and train families in Northwest Missouri, specifically the counties of Andrew, Atchison, Buchanan, Caldwell, Carroll, Cass, Chariton, Clay, Clinton, Cooper, Daviess, DeKalb, Gentry, Grundy, Harrison, Holt, Jackson, Johnson, Lafayette, Linn, Livingston, Mercer, Nodaway, Pettis, Platte, Putnam, Ray, Saline, Sullivan, and Worth.

Foster Care

- Are there different types of foster care?
  Different “levels” of care might be a better way to describe it.
  - Traditional – Care for a child in state custody for an indefinite period of time.
  - Emergency – A 30-day maximum placement that provides caseworkers an opportunity to identify a long-term home.
  - Respite – Temporary, short-term care that gives foster parents a break from foster-care responsibilities.
  - Medical – Care for children who require extra support because of disabilities or medical needs.
  - Elevated-needs (levels A and B) – Care for children with moderate to severe behavioral/emotional needs.
  - Treatment – Care for children with severe behavioral/emotional needs.

- Do you provide any kind of training?
  Yes, we do … and it’s FREE. As a matter of fact, in the state of Missouri, you are required to complete 27 hours of STARS training to become a licensed foster parent. To become an adoptive parent, you must complete an additional 12 hours of Spaulding training. Once you have your foster care license, you are required to complete 30 hours of in-service training annually. You can find a variety of course topics on the training calendar that help you increase your skills and develop a strong support network.

- How long does it take to get licensed?
  The whole process usually takes between 90 and 120 days.

- If I’m single, can I foster or adopt?
  Most definitely! We have some wonderful foster/adoptive parents who are single.

- I’m in a same-sex relationship, and my partner and I have lived together for years. Are we eligible to foster or adopt?
  That’s a resounding Yes! Times and attitudes have changed … and for the better. We’re looking for safe, stable, nurturing homes for children who have been traumatized. If you can provide that, we want you to join us.
What's the difference between a caseworker and a family development specialist?
- Caseworkers work with the child, their birth parents, and their needs.
- Family development specialists (also known as licensing workers) work with foster parents to ensure that the home environment remains compliant with licensing regulations and that the foster parents' needs are met.

I don't think I'm cut out to be a foster parent. Are there other things I can do to help?
Of course! Foster parenting isn't for everyone, but don't let that stop you from getting involved. Consider providing respite care (i.e., caring for foster children for a short period of time, such as over a weekend). You can also volunteer or be a mentor or provide space for meetings and training ... there are numerous ways you can help. Call us to discuss where you fit in.

Adoption

What kinds of adoption do you facilitate?
We facilitate only state-custody adoptions (cases in which a child has been removed from his or her parents because of abuse or neglect). These adoptions occur within three scenarios:
- Legal risk – In this scenario, the birth parents’ rights have not yet been terminated. (The state has recommended termination, but the court has not yet ruled.) The risk is that the court may decide not to terminate the parents’ rights, or a family member not previously known may come forward to adopt the child.
- Free for adoption – In this scenario, the birth parent’s rights have been terminated and the child is “free for adoption.” As soon as the termination is finalized, the child's team meets to identify suitable prospects based on the child's needs.
- Foster care to adoption – Many times, foster parents choose to adopt their foster child once he or she is free for adoption. Foster parents who have cared for a child continuously for nine months or longer are given first consideration as adoptive parents. We consider this scenario to be the best for state-custody adoptions for both the child and the adoptive parents.

How much does an adoption cost?
State-custody adoptions involve little to no cost to the adoptive parents. An adoption subsidy is available (but not guaranteed) to help with any adoption costs.

What is an open adoption?
“Open adoption” means that the birth parents and adoptive parents know one another to some degree.
At one end of the spectrum, the birth parents may never meet the adoptive parents or ever have contact with them, but they know who they are.
At the other end of the spectrum, the birth parents meet the adoptive parents, visit their home, and have ongoing contact throughout the child's life.
The degree of openness depends upon the comfort level of both the birth parents and the adoptive parents. When it’s deemed to be in the best interest of the child, we strongly support open adoptions.

What are my chances of adopting an infant?
If you’re interested in adopting an infant, you should probably go through a private adoption agency. Even though infants and toddlers are sometimes available, the majority of children in state custody are school age. Additionally, the goal of Cornerstones is to limit the number of transitions (or homes) a child goes through. To that end, we give preference to foster families that have provided a home to a specific child (including infants) for at least nine months. So perhaps becoming a foster parent first might be a consideration.
The Stark Reality: Missouri’s Need by the Numbers

The *Child Maltreatment 2012* annual report from the Department of Health and Human Services states:

- Since 2008, overall rates of children who received CPS [child protective services] responses increased by 4.7 percent, from 40.8 to 42.7 per 1,000 children in the population.
- Nationally, four-fifths (78.3%) of victims were neglected, 18.3 percent were physically abused, 9.3 percent were sexually abused, and 8.5 percent were psychologically maltreated.
- For 2012, a nationally estimated 1,640 children died of abuse and neglect at a rate of 2.20 children per 100,000 children in the national population.

### Hotline Reports of Child Abuse and Neglect

**Missouri** – 62,880 reports

- **Missouri**: 56.8 calls per 1,000 children
- **U.S.**: 46.1 calls per 1,000 children

### Cases Involving Alcohol Abuse by Caregiver

**Missouri** – 388 cases

- **Missouri**: 8.3% of all cases
- **U.S.**: 8.8% of all cases

### Children Involved in Abuse and Neglect Investigations

**Missouri** – 4,685 victims

- **Missouri**: 3.3 victims per 1,000 children
- **U.S.**: 9.2 victims per 1,000 children

### Cases Involving Drug Abuse by Caregiver

**Missouri** – 1,018 cases

- **Missouri**: 21.7% of all cases
- **U.S.**: 20% of all cases
Children (Re)Entering State Custody

- **NW Missouri**
  - Reentering: 288 (18.2%)
  - Entering: 1,293 (81.8%)

- **State of Missouri**
  - Reentering: 1,071 (15.0%)
  - Entering: 6,057 (85.0%)

Ages of Children in State Custody

- **NW Missouri**
  - Age 0-2: 819 (17.6%)
  - Age 3-5: 783 (16.8%)
  - Age 6-8: 566 (12.2%)
  - Age 9-11: 603 (13.0%)
  - Age 12-14: 1,174 (25.2%)
  - Age 15+: 706 (15.2%)

- **State of Missouri**
  - Age 0-2: 3,963 (15.2%)
  - Age 3-5: 3,513 (16.8%)
  - Age 6-8: 3,113 (13.0%)
  - Age 9-11: 2,575 (12.4%)
  - Age 12-14: 4,864 (25.0%)
  - Age 15+: 2,956 (15.2%)

# of Placements per Child in State Custody

- **NW Missouri**
  - 1 Placement: 1,483 (15.0%)
  - 2 Placements: 1,255 (27.0%)
  - 3 Placements: 677 (14.6%)
  - 4 Placements: 447 (9.6%)
  - 5 Placements: 268 (5.7%)
  - 6-10 Placements: 451 (9.7%)
  - 11-15 Placements: 60 (1.3%)
  - 16+ Placements: 10 (0.2%)

- **State of Missouri**
  - 1 Placement: 6,063 (31.2%)
  - 2 Placements: 5,448 (28.0%)
  - 3 Placements: 3,046 (15.7%)
  - 4 Placements: 1,749 (9.0%)
  - 5 Placements: 1,042 (5.4%)
  - 6-10 Placements: 1,471 (7.5%)
  - 11-15 Placements: 1,071 (5.5%)
  - 16+ Placements: 103 (0.5%)

Source: Missouri Children’s Division 2015 annual report.
Growing up in an abusive or neglectful home affects children in many ways. Since children lack the coping skills and life experiences to handle trauma, they frequently reveal their fears and frustrations through inappropriate words and behaviors. These children have elevated needs, meaning they require more from their foster/adoptive families ... more patience, more understanding, more structure, more positive reinforcement ... more. It can seem overwhelming, but with the right support, these children can work through their past traumas and look forward to a bright future.

At Cornerstones of Care, our greatest challenge is finding families willing to go above and beyond and give just a little more.

Keep in mind that ALL children, even those not in state custody, experience times of problems, difficulties, and challenges. That’s when they need us the most. Cornerstones is looking for foster/adoptive parents who are eager to teach and guide these children and to help turn them into fine young adults.
About Us

A child in the U.S. is abused or neglected every 42 seconds.
Children’s Defense Fund; January 2011

Your Foster Care and Adoption Connection

Cornerstones of Care provides safe and nurturing homes for children who have been abused or neglected. Working hand in hand with the State of Missouri Children's Division, Cornerstones is the link to foster, adoptive, and kinship families. We recruit, train, and support these resource families in the 30 counties of Northwest Missouri.

Cornerstones of Care
Cornerstones of Care is dedicated to strengthening children, families, and the communities in which they live. Our mission is to improve the lives of at-risk children and families, ultimately reducing the effects of adverse childhood experiences, decreasing the incidence of violence and incarceration, increasing the ability to live independently, and providing children and families with hope and a strong foundation for success.

Ways You Can Help
We understand that not everyone is cut out to be a foster or adoptive parent. That's OK. There are other ways in which members of the community can help.

- Be an ambassador and spread the word.
- Distribute foster care literature throughout your community.
- Help us identify potential foster families.
- Host a recruitment event.
- Provide space for foster care support and training purposes.


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