



2025 Annual Report





A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO

The year 2025 brought both meaningful transitions and exciting new opportunities for VCR and the families we serve.

After 11 impactful years, funding for Project LAUNCH came to a close. Through this initiative, VCR introduced the Parent Café model to St. Louis – a framework that has since expanded beyond our region and continues to be implemented statewide. This legacy reflects the power of investing in parent leadership and strengthening families as partners in change.

At the same time, we launched new partnerships to meet emerging needs. Through the Regional Community Partners Program with Child Care Aware of Missouri, VCR began supporting families navigating the child care subsidy application process, removing barriers, and increasing access to essential early childhood resources.

Youth and parent leadership remained at the center of our work. Both our Parent Advisory Council and Youth Advisory Council continue to shape programs, strategies, and community solutions through lived experience and collective voice.

In partnership with the Deaconess Foundation, VCR launched a transformative youth participatory grantmaking initiative- NextGen Grantmakers- designed to place funding decisions directly in the hands of young changemakers. This effort reimagines traditional grantmaking by shifting power to youth, not simply as beneficiaries, but as decision-makers. Youth leaders reviewed 97 applications and awarded five organizations \$20,000 each to support efforts that matter most to them and their communities.

VCR also continues to lead and contribute to key collaborative efforts, including the System of Care Council, LIFT-MO, LEAP Ahead STL, and the STLCANN Collaborative, all dedicated to promoting well-being and prevention. This year, we celebrated the 10th annual Stepping Up for Kids, honoring the incredible resource families and front-line agency staff who provide outstanding service to children in foster and adoptive care.

We further expanded community access to data. Our Children's Data Center is now publicly available, allowing partners and residents to generate customized reports at the zip code and school district levels. By placing data directly in the hands of the community, we are supporting more informed decisions and advancing equitable strategies.

As we look ahead, we remain focused on progress and extend our sincere gratitude to the partners, parents, and providers who make this work possible.

Sincerely,

Sararia Sulaiman

President & CEO

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2025

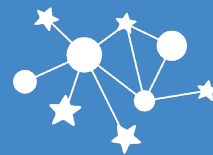
330+

Youth and families received peer support.



4,182

Early Childhood Screenings.



Partnership in Action

A mother of two was just one week away from eviction, facing \$4,500 in back rent. After connecting with VCR's Resource Advocate, our team partnered with Legal Services of Eastern Missouri and Crisis Nursery to secure full payment of her rent and remove her from the eviction docket. Thanks to this coordinated support, she and her children remain safely housed.



450+

Resource Referrals made.



860+

Outreach Connections.

Walking with Families Through Crisis

When a parent reached out in crisis, our team stood beside her as she called the Domestic Violence Hotline. With support from our advocate, she connected to safe shelter and later to longer-term services that helped her leave the dangerous situation. Throughout the process, she had someone supporting her every step of the way.



452



Organizational Participants in Collaborative Meetings.

NEXTGEN

(in Partnership with Deaconess Foundation)



1 Youth Led Process.
97 Applications.
5 Awardees Selected.

SYSTEM OF CARE

The System of Care – St. Louis (SOC-STL) is more than a program or initiative, it's a philosophy. It is impactful because of its multifaceted group of members and because these organizations and members are organized into a coordinated network to address and meet the varied needs of youth at risk of being diagnosed with or already diagnosed with Serious Emotional Disorders (SED)s, their families, and their caregivers.

We center our work around and build upon the strengths of youth and their families.

Family Support Partner Program

The Family Support Partner Program connects parents/caregivers with a Family Support Partner (FSP). FSPs provide peer support to families as they connect to and navigate mental health services. FSPs have lived experience as a parent, or family member of a child/youth with a serious emotional disorder, as well as a deep connection to the St. Louis community.

Children, youth, and families can connect to our FSPs through our Community Referral program or they can be connected by a referring partner agency. This year we held over 100 Touchpoint Meetings with providers, including BJC, Peoples, St. Louis City Family Court, St. Louis County Family Court, Children's Division, and our school partnerships. We know that working together takes intentionality and consistency, and that is why these Touchpoint Meetings have been so powerful.

The System of Care Council

SOC-STL consists of institutions, units of government, organizations, and youth and family representatives that have all committed to advance the System of Care Philosophy. Over 40 MOU holders are committed to this work, coming together through bi-monthly meetings that center listening, information-sharing, and strengthening our collective impact.

Together we are a more coordinated network and more fully able to serve children, youth, and families. Our Critical Case Staffing Team is a prime example of these efforts. It grew out of an awareness that the systems are not enough and there are times that even providers hit a wall when trying to support youth. The Critical Case Staffing Team is designed specifically for that – supporting the referring agency and the identified parent/caregiver, when system barriers exist and resources have been exhausted to ensure that every child and youth receives the supports they deserve.

Parent Advisory Council

Families should be at the center of decisions that impact them, and that is exactly why Parent Advisory Councils are so important to us. The System of Care Parent Advisory Council has grown this year to nearly 40 active members.

Family Support Network & Vitality Cafés

The Family Support Network Group is designed to bring together the families we walk alongside for peer-to-peer support. This group provides the space for families to connect and support one another. This year we began hosting Vitality Cafés within this group and it has been a great source of encouragement and growth.

STORY OF IMPACT

One of the families our (SOC) team works with was significantly impacted by the May 16th tornado. This family is very engaged in our work and we have seen their commitment shine through amidst these challenges. Mom has completed our FSP program and remains connected through our Parent Advisory Council and Family Support Network, and her two daughters are making a difference through their work with our Youth Advisory Council.

We are so grateful to know that the family is safe and has obtained new housing. The two daughters were home when the tornado hit and their roof caved. They were all immediately displaced as their home was uninhabitable, and they spent weeks in a shelter due to the situation. Our Family Support Partners worked closely with them to navigate the difficult time, offering them support and helping them connect with resources.

Through all of this, Mom continued to work, and they all continued to show up for our programming--making a difference for youth mental health amidst all that they were going through.

SYSTEM OF CARE (cont.)

Youth Advisory Council

We are so incredibly proud of the Youth Advisory Council – it is made up of youth committed to supporting one another and advocating for a better future. The council is open to all youth that have or are at risk for severe emotional, mental, and/or behavioral challenges are ready to step up and make a difference...and they are doing exactly that. This year, the Youth Advisory Council:

- Trained in the new Café model, #WoWTalk Cafes or “Words of Wisdom” Cafés. These are geared specially for young people and generate conversations that help build the Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors using Be Strong Families’ nationally recognized Café model.
- Consistently have 20 or more active members making a difference.
- Hosted two #WowTalk Cafés this year after completing the comprehensive training in March.
- Have a core group of five members that also gather for leadership meetings, engage with the wider System of Care Council, and continue to step up and guide this work.
- Presented at the Annual Children’s Mental Health Day Celebration offering powerful calls to action on mental health and demonstrated the importance of engaging and highlighting the voices of youth people in our community.

NextGen

“Youth are not just the future – they are the present, and their voices are essential in shaping the change they want to see.”

– Sanaria Sulaiman

The Youth Advisory Council stepped up in a bold way this year with the NextGen Grantmaking Initiative! This youth-led effort – powered by VCR in partnership with The Deaconess Foundation – empowers young changemakers to lead the grantmaking process, centering funding decisions on equity, justice, and community impact. This remarkable group of young people brought their creativity, focus, and dedication to the work and reviewed 97 applications before selecting the five finalists!

“Serving on the Advisory Council has greatly shaped my perspective on connecting with my generation through meaningful, solution-driven conversations. Focusing on other youth through strategic planning has been at the core of my leadership, and YAC has embodied that vision. I truly appreciate the positive impact it’s making in the generation.”

– Abraham Blue, Youth Advisory Council Member

CHILD CARE AWARE OF MISSOURI (CCAMO)

Beginning in August, Child Care Aware of Missouri (CCAMO) partnered with four regional organizations to expand access to child care subsidies by providing in-person and virtual application support to families across the state. VCR was selected as one of the Regional Community Partners and began delivering services in October.

Building on our strong foundation of family engagement, we identified a parent who was ready to step into this new role as a Community Support Specialist. The primary focus of this position is assisting families with completing the child care subsidy application, helping to reduce barriers to access and support successful enrollment.



FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

For more than a decade, we have intentionally centered parent and family engagement as a cornerstone of our work. This commitment builds on our 30+ year mission to promote the well-being of children, youth, and their families—particularly those impacted by socioeconomic risk and racial inequity. Guided by this mission, we use data as a foundational tool for understanding community needs, fostering collaborative action, and advocating for meaningful policy and community investment.

Thanks to the vision of our leadership and the support of key federal grants and initiatives, we have strengthened this work by deeply centering family and community voice in everything we do.

Parent and family engagement is foundational to improving children’s well-being and remains a core focus area of Vision for Children at Risk (VCR). We engage, empower, and educate parents and caregivers so they are equipped to be the best parents they can be. We believe in the power of parents to create positive, lasting change within their own families and across our region.

Our Family Support Services bring this commitment to life through peer support and trusted relationships. These services also serve as a critical pathway for sustaining the impactful work initially launched through grant funding. Built on a braided funding model, our Family Support Services Program is

strengthening long-term sustainability by working closely with partners to bill Medicaid and secure ongoing support for this essential work.

Family Support Services are currently implemented by Vision for Children at Risk and funded by St. Louis County Children’s Service Fund and St. Louis Mental Health Board.

This year, VCR’s Family Support Services served more than 100 families. Many were directly impacted by the May 16th tornado in North St. Louis, and our team responded quickly and consistently. Staff were on site daily at the Disaster Recovery Center, providing information and support to hundreds of families seeking assistance. Through partnerships with community agencies, including efforts based out of the Deaconess Center, families received direct relief support, while others were connected to resources such as FEMA, the Red Cross, United Way, and additional community partners.

Families received direct aid kits with food, hygiene, and cleaning supplies, along with follow-up support and referrals for needs such as debris removal and home repairs. When transportation barriers arose, the FSS team collaborated with partners—and in urgent situations used their own vehicles—to deliver supplies and clothing directly to families. One family of 11 shared heartfelt thanks after the team independently coordinated and delivered clothing for every household member in a single day.

LEAP AHEAD

LEAP (Learning Everything at Pace) Ahead STL is a collaborative effort that we provide backbone support for. This regional effort was established to better support developmental, social, and emotional screening along with the coordination of resources and referrals to ensure St. Louis area children (birth to age five) enter kindergarten ready to learn.

Together, this group tracked

4,182 screenings in 2025!

Early childhood screenings are an important step in making sure every child and family receives supports early.

In addition, we are working closely with this group to make insights and trends found in this screening data more accessible to LEAP Ahead members and the broader community.

Stay tuned in 2026 for this!

STLCANN

The STLCANN board is dedicated to improving the lives of children and families impacted by abuse or neglect and strengthening families to prevent future harm.

In 2025, we celebrated the 10th Annual Stepping Up for Kids event, honoring community partners, resource families, frontline staff, and champions for children. These remarkable individuals step up every day to support children and families, and it was inspiring to hear their stories and recognize their tireless efforts.

This year, we also hosted three impactful trainings designed to foster perspective, insight, and self-care:

- **Voices of Lived Experience** – A panel featuring biological parents and former foster youth sharing their journeys
- **Voices from the Field** – Social workers and professionals from child-serving agencies reflecting on their work and experiences
- **After the Storm** – A reflective session inspired by the May 16 tornado, which explored vicarious trauma and helped participants process the impact while supporting both themselves and their communities

Through events and trainings like these, STLCANN continues to connect, educate, and strengthen the network of support for children and families in St. Louis.



“It was refreshing being able to have the opportunity to hear stories about personal experiences. It was a great opportunity to hear where improvement needs to begin from the negative experiences.”

“I loved hearing the lived experiences from the presenters. I was a great reminder to remember the people in this work.”

“Loved hearing the outcome of our work – did it work? And learning what we can do better.”



LIFT-MO

Department of Social Services (DSS) data shows that families accessing TANF prior to involvement with the child welfare system are twice as likely as the general Missouri population to be the subject of a Child Abuse and Neglect Investigation and twice as likely to have their children placed in foster care within 60 days of the hotline call.

The goal of LIFT-MO is to decrease the number of families on TANF with subsequent child welfare involvement by helping them connect to resources and build strong support systems.

Our Resource Advocate served over 130 families this year, building trust through relationship and walking alongside families to as they navigate services and build strengths and supports to thrive amidst challenges and barriers. We were also honored this year to have our LIFT-MO and VCR team present at a Family and Community Trust (FACT) Board meeting where staff and partners were invited to join. LIFT-MO continues to be an example of how collaboration strengthens systems and families.

STORY OF IMPACT

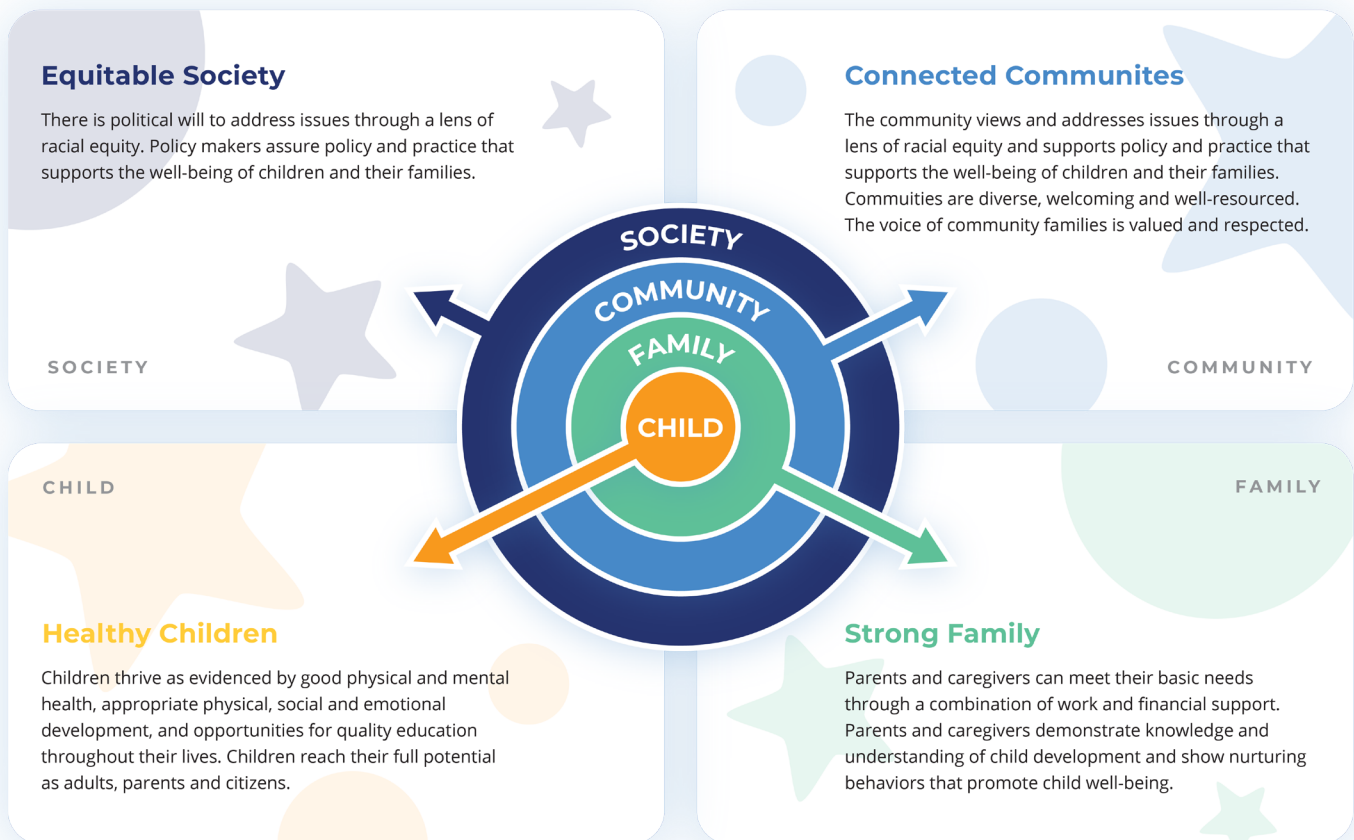
When a parent reached out while experiencing a domestic violence crisis, our Resource Advocate stayed alongside her to ensure she was not navigating the situation alone. Facing immediate safety concerns, the advocate supported her during a call with the Domestic Violence Hotline, providing reassurance as she shared her story.

Through this connection, the parent was able to access emergency shelter and complete the intake process to leave the unsafe situation. She was also connected to an organization that provided longer-term housing and stability. Throughout the process—including moments when placement options were uncertain—our advocate remained a steady presence, offering encouragement, follow-up, and support to ensure the parent felt heard, respected, and supported every step of the way.

“The Lift program has been super helpful I really appreciated the phone call from [the Resource Advocate] just to check and see how everything is going and the immediate need to want to help me succeed. There was a great connection. I did receive referrals dated for the near future; she was also able to help me receive supplies from the center the same day.”

ADVOCACY

Vision for Children at Risk embraces a Socio-Ecological Model of Change in which the well-being of children is a shared responsibility that requires the concerted effort of society, communities, and families.



Our theory of change is based on these assumptions:

- Racial and economic inequities exist that adversely impact the well-being of children;
- Family and community voice are critical in creating meaningful change;
- Families and communities must be included as leaders in the (re)creation and implementation of the systems, policies, and practices that impact their lives;
- Child well-being cannot be separated from family well-being; and
- Movement toward child well-being requires macro level policy change as well as micro level change in individual lives.

We believe that meaningful long-term change will result when these outcomes are achieved.

Download our Theory of Change here or by scanning the QR code to the right.



Legislative Wrap-Up

This year, our annual Legislative Wrap-Up reviewed the 2025 legislative session and highlighted next steps for how nonprofits, advocates, and community partners can support children and families in the year ahead. Attendees joined a dynamic conversation connecting reflection with action, reviewing key policy developments, discussing their impacts, and planning collaborative strategies. Panelists included Amy Blouin from the Missouri Budget Project, Jessica Seitz with The Network Against Child Abuse, and Robyn Schelp from Kids Win Missouri.

DATA & RESEARCH

Expanded Reach

This year, we focused on critical backend and foundational work to expand our data collection from five counties to six with the new addition of Monroe County, Illinois. This data will be incorporated into our interactive online Children’s Data Center and included in next year’s—and future—printed Children of Metropolitan St. Louis (CMSL) Data Book. We are excited about the expanded reach and increased representation this brings for children and families.

Impact of the Data

This year reinforced the importance of our data and research work—particularly the need for accessible data that communities can examine, study, and use to respond to how children and families are faring across our region. During the 43-day government shutdown, access to critical Census data was suddenly unavailable, limiting the community’s ability to fully understand the landscape of need and services.

Throughout this period, our Children’s Data Center remained active. It includes Census data and much more: a carefully curated collection of indicators that illustrate child and family well-being across the region. These data are drawn from sources including the U.S. Census and American Community Survey, the Missouri Department of Social Services, Child Care Aware of Missouri, the Illinois Department of Human Services, and others

[\(read the full 2024 report here\).](#)

The Children’s Data Center and the CMSL Data Book support a wide range of uses. Most commonly, they are used for grant and funding applications, reporting, and program development and planning. Users of the Data Book have shared the following ways they apply the data in their work:

“The CMSL Data Book has been an excellent resource for helping us understand the landscape and needs in our community and how we, as a mental health provider, can help address needs and provide resources.”

“I have utilized the data book for years with my grant writing efforts and community advocacy work.”

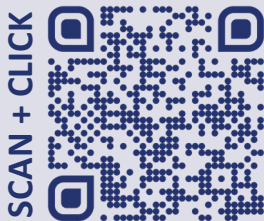
“We are in a period of transition and growth for our Youth Development program. As we continue to grow to meet the needs of the children we serve who have experienced childhood domestic abuse, we want to develop informed programming and proposals. The stats are helpful when developing programming and proposals.”

“It helps to determine what the greatest needs are for the populations we serve.”

Community Report

We value our strong partnership with the YWCA and were honored to be invited to conduct an In-Depth Program Analysis of their Head Start and Early Head Start programs in St. Louis City and County. Building on the Community Assessment Report completed in 2024, this analysis was grounded in parent and community input. Our team led both the analysis and design of the report, which synthesized findings from a parent/guardian survey, parent focus groups, and a community partner survey. The resulting report supports the YWCA in making data-informed, strategic decisions to strengthen and sustain their Head Start and Early Head Start programming.

EXPLORE THE CHILDREN’S DATA CENTER



OUR BOARD & FINANCIALS

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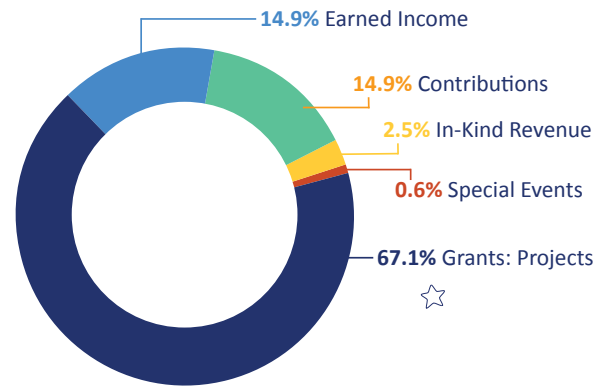
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FUNDERS

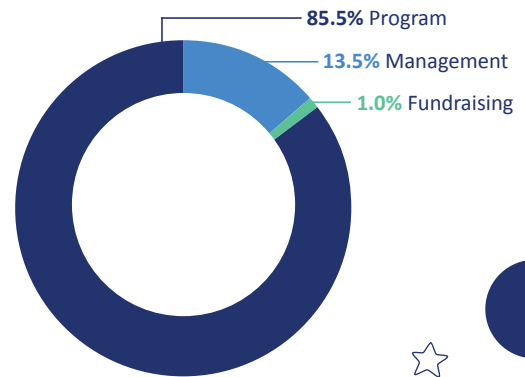
Child Care Aware of Missouri (CCAMO)
Family and Community Trust
STL County Children's Service Funds
Deaconess Foundation
The Mental Health Board
St. Louis County Courts
STUPP Foundation
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services
Administration (SAMHSA)

REVENUE \$3,211,108



2024 numbers

EXPENSES \$1,927,844



Get Involved

Your support helps create a better future for children and families in St. Louis.

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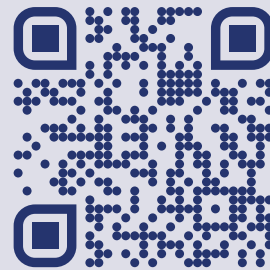


Stay inspired, connected, and help share opportunities.



Donate & Support

Your gift helps us provide and sustain important programming and resources for children and families. **Scan to give.**



Learn More

Explore our programs and initiatives to learn more about how we are walking alongside families and impacting systems for the better.



Donate & Support

Share our programs with your friends, family, and colleagues – help us grow our impact!

