



“Create Don’t Wait”

SOCCEED, 2026

This year has gone by incredibly fast, it’s hard to believe that we are almost in 2026! So much has happened and I wanted to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their time and expertise. Without you, none of what the SOC accomplishes would happen. Most importantly, the lives of people would not have otherwise been impacted by your generosity, talent, and expertise. From that thousands have been heard, clothed, housed, fed, and set up for success thus breaking what in some cases has been generational struggles with poverty, mental health, and more. Before we get to the plans for 2026, here is a review of 2025. Each month included a specific focus related back to our year’s theme along with sharing of resources and general updates. The SOC further was available to staff and did staff cases throughout the year.

2025 in Review: Featured Presentations



Last Year’s Theme: Health is Wealth

January:

- This month focused on our own health. How we as providers manage hearing and responding to significant traumas, emergencies, and disasters is a critical part of that response.
- A mini workshop was conducted by HIP or, the Heroic Imagination Project. HIP builds capacity and thereby increases resiliency to secondary traumas, builds crisis response skills, and more.

- Presenters: Ellie Jacques, HIP Trainer, Administration, & Board Member
Suzanne Bernier, Certified Emergency Manager, Business Continuity Professional, and Certified Crisis Manager & Communication Professional

February:

- This month focused on dangerously cold weather and breaking cycles of things such as poverty, homelessness, and mental health struggles. Being homeless impacts children in particular in specific ways and often disrupts, school, normal childhood development, and further exposes children to increased risks for violence all of which can take a significant toll on mental health.
- The following presentations occurred to lay the foundation for the discussions on the aforementioned topics:
 - Jennifer Munroe, Senior Director of Community Operations at Swope Health
 - Laurie Schwab, Executive Director of Red Door
 - Crystalle Green, Director, Trauma-Informed Care-Sparkwheel
 - Rachelle Soden, Grants Compliance Officer-Sparkwheel, Certified HOPE Facilitator

March:

- The focus in March was on it being “Disability Awareness Month.” More specifically, children with disabilities was the primary focus.
- The following guest presenter spoke on the aforementioned topic:
 - Kathy Kay, Chief Executive Officer-The Whole Person
- As an addition, Jonathan Kurtz, NOAA Federal & NWS spoke on safety as we approach severe weather season. Free weather radios were also distributed to anyone interested.

April:

- This month focused on it including “Earth Day.” We approached it from the perspective that the greatest natural resources are people and people can have a multitude of issues that can interfere with overall wellness. The focus thereby was on financial wellness, emergency health preparedness, and systems of care expansions.
- The following were our presenters:
 - Haley Hazem, Financial Adviser-Prime Financial
 - John Ezell, Emergency Response Planner-Jackson County Public Health Department
 - JJ Gossrau, Director of Young Adult Services, Missouri Department of Mental Health
- In April and under the SOC’s “Cancel Cancer” initiative, we conducted a community-based health and wellness fair.

May:

- In May, the focus was on children having a safe, fun, and educational summer break. Child abuse rates, poverty, and other factors impact mental health and many children lack necessary summer resources. Further during the summer, children are often away from mandated reporters and resources that make them feel safe, valued, and respected.
- The following people presented valuable information:
 - Dr. Danielle Horton, Child Abuse Pediatrician, Division of Childhood Adversity & Resilience-Children's Mercy Hospital
 - Bry Barber, Public Relations Specialist-Missouri Children's Trust Fund
 - Isaac Halberstadt, Outreach Librarian-Central Library
- The SOC partnered with the Zero-Abuse Project to make available, a free training to all mental health and other practitioners.

June:

- In June, the focus was on the power of people, every day people from all walks of life that are doing extraordinary things that have huge impacts.
- Our featured presenter was Jennifer McCartney, Executive Director of the Kansas City Heroes. Jennifer started this nonprofit as a low-income, single mother and it is now flourishing as one of the largest nonprofits in the community that focuses on empowering people.
- A video clip of a young lady from St. Louis was played. She is not even a teen yet and started a nonprofit that assembled kids to have an impact on their communities.

July:

- This month focused on child abuse and sexual abuse prevention.
- The first half of the meeting was devoted to a workshop sponsored by the SOC from the Zero Abuse Project. Kathleen Nolan, Senior Executive with the Zero Abuse Project presented. Kathleen is also an Attorney with 15 years of experience as a Prosecutor in the area of child protection.
- A panel discussion about child abuse and protection occurred.

August:

- In August, we did not have a usual, virtual SOC meeting with just the professionals. During this month, we met in-person and the meeting was open to children and adults. The SOC sponsored bringing Zach Gowen in as the featured presenter. Zach

- presented a workshop at Eitas who was generous in offering us the accessible space free of cost! Zach is the only WWE Wrestler ever to also be an amputee. He continues to wrestle and recently appeared on NXT, but he also travels the world as a motivational speaker for people with all sorts of disabilities. Zach's in-person presentation was very powerful for both children and adults with disabilities, any sort of challenge in their lives. Zach gave free copies of his autobiography, signed the books, and posed for pictures. Participants were heard to be making comments that they felt like they could be athletes or whatever they wanted despite being told they could not, that their disabilities would prevent them from realizing their dreams.

September:

- This month recognized that it is "Disaster Preparedness Month" as well as Suicide Prevention Month, and Self-Care Awareness Month. Our featured presentations and resources represented each of these areas.
- The following people presented at the September meeting:
 - Morgan Dunleavy, Director of Nursing & Director of Emergency Management-Children's Mercy Hospital
 - I (Jennifer) highlighted some things from a presentation that I did at the IAEM on Children in Disasters. Discussion especially emphasized the mental health of children who have experienced trauma.
 - The SOC initiative, Stronger Together KC WATCH expanded its coverage to focus on seniors mental health as they have a rapidly growing suicide rate.
 - The SOC has an existing initiative called Care for the Caregivers and I reiterated that in part can be used to promote wellness amongst our community providers.

October:

- In October, the SOC focused on available community assistance programs to promote overall wellness especially given the then government shutdown.
- Our featured presentations included:
 - Alsiha Duarte, Manager of Customer Affairs-Evergy
 - Grace Chapel, Youth & Family Liaison-Early Psychosis Care Center
 - Life Launch
 - Futures First

November:

- With the extended government shutdown and especially SNAP benefits being suspended because of this, the SOC extended the focus began last month on community-based resources to help sustain people during these difficult times.
- I (Jennifer) gave a comprehensive presentation on all different types of resources via PowerPoint. In this was also a poverty simulator that we ran through highlighting the

- many difficult decisions that people often have to make. Poverty Ends Where Resources Begin was the presentation title.
- I highlighted the SOC initiative called the Ray Way Resource Directory. This is the SOC's first initiative and is a published weekly resource directory that is 106 or so pages, has 24 categories, and covers the KC Metro area (now extending more also into KS).

December:

- December is traditionally our “un-meeting” month where there is no formal agenda or presentations because it is so close to the holidays. The room is open though in case there is an urgent need of some sort that may have just come up, to share resources, anything!
- In this “un-meeting”, several needs were presented to the group including household needs, holiday, and more. The SOC was able to connect everyone to what was needed.

Accomplishment Highlights Over the Year

- Health Fair was conducted
- Expansion of the Cancel Cancer Initiative
- Sponsored kids so they could go to camp
- Made \$1500 available to recognize charities and support them given the increased demand for assistance
- Zero Abuse Workshop
- HIP workshop
- Zach Gowen in-person workshop for children and adults. Zach is the only ever WWE wrestler who is also an amputee. He is also an inspirational speaker for children and adults who have disabilities.
- Sponsored people for the holidays
- Provided goods and money to keep people warm
- Provided weather radios
- Provided fans
- Maintained 2 dozen initiatives
- Staffed multiple cases involving children and families with significant needs.

Areas for Growth

- Around April or May, the SOC encountered a significant issue with being able to routinely send mass emails. System limitations that were instituted after mandatory changes limited our communication capabilities and what happened was most emails were being kicked back as “Spam.” For a time, we could not email some people at all because our emails were misread as “Spam.” One solution was tried but did not in the end prove to be successful. It has since been resolved in that we can send out mass emails but must break them down into chunks which slows the process. This is an area that we continue to look into for the most effective and efficient solution.
- The mobile version of the desktop of our website does not completely function the way it should. I have worked with the platform that we use to fix these issues and some of them remain. I am likely going to completely redesign the mobile app and build back better. This may include a refresh of the current desktop site as well that does function without issues.

- Membership has remained steady, but steady does not foster expansion. With that said, the SOC will reinstitute its ongoing membership plan to be poised to best support providers and the community.

Plan for 2026

The theme for 2026 is “Create Don’t Wait” This was selected because of the power that every day people demonstrated during the government shutdown and when SNAP benefits ceased. People from all walks of life, saw needs and filled those needs. Programs were created, partnerships were formed, and the power behind communities, very evident. During a time of so many resources evaporating, the power behind community prevailed. It is that spirit that the SOC will focus on in 2026. In this regard, all of the current community-based initiatives will continue into 2026 along with the partnerships that support those endeavors.

To kick things off in January, the SOC will be focusing on some of the most impactful examples of the power of community and what that can accomplish:

- Marsha Wiard, Early Care & Education Specialist-Futures First
Executive Director-Opals Embrace (<https://www.opalsembrace.org/>)
- Robert Williams, Director-Co-Parenting Ikigai (<https://www.coparentingikigai.org/>)
- To be announced

New Additions:

- Strategic Collaboration with the Kansas City Regional COAD or, Community Organizations Active in Disasters (www.kansascityregionalcoad.org). In the interest of transparency, I am also the Chair of the KCR COAD. This aside, these two organizations need one another but do not nearly connect as deeply as they should. The COAD are most often, your emergency planners, managers, and other technical people who work tirelessly to keep communities as safe as possible when disasters strike. The SOC tends to be (with some current overlap with the COAD), your frontline human service providers that provide the day to day services communities need in order to thrive. More than ever during an emergency, these two groups need one another so that our respective communities can regain a sense of stability. The best way to accomplish this is to bring these two groups together during “blue skies”, or good times so that each is well-versed on who does what, particular needs are, assets, etc. The COAD has 9 committees including one for Children in Disasters and SOC members would fit seamlessly into those committees. This is all being done to provide the absolute best level of care to people when they need it the most.
- SOC expansion involvement. This SOC will continue to partner and collaborate with other SOC's and state entities to expand to areas that lack an SOC.
- Monthly report outs. On at least a monthly basis, a report of all of the SOC's activities will be posted to our website in the interest of transparency.

- FIFA World Cup. The SOC along with the KCR COAD will continue to collaborate with the respective entities involved with planning for FIFA in Kansas City. The SOC's focus will be on meeting the mental health needs of visitors and the community as a whole during this time. Additional focus will be on more generalized needs as resources will be greatly taxed by the predicted influx of people to the Kansas City Metropolitan Area. Further special attention is being given to housing during this time as the demand for such will likely be more than the availability especially for those already at-risk or currently, houseless. Families calling motels home at the present time are likely to be displaced in favor of people who will pay the greatly increased rates. A room for example that may currently cost \$75 per night will easily go for hundreds of dollars per night once FIFA happens. Many will not be able to meet greatly inflated rates and are risk for being displaced. This will impact mental and physical health and so much more making it difficult for them to regain their stability once the event has concluded.