Team Information

Project Name

Calling All Placements Alert or CAP Alert

Team Members

Minimum: 3; Maximum: 8

	Name	Department/Division	Email address
1	**Alisha Otis**	Department of Social Services / Children's Division	Alisha.G.Otis@dss.mo.gov
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Your Pitch

What problem are you addressing? (No more than 200 words)

The current method utilized by Children's Division to find foster placements is inefficient, time consuming, and generally unproductive. These are critical times of additional trauma during which youth need the attention and comfort of the worker. Frequently they are waiting in an office, police station, or hospital where they are uncomfortable, bored, and scared. They overhear the worker repeatedly describe them and their abuse or neglect situation and feel rejected when a foster parent says "No" to placement. These situations often occur after office hours or on weekends, sometimes resulting in sleeping on office chairs or pallets on the floor. Compensatory time for multiple workers is required, adding to worker retention issues and labor costs. Information about foster home openings is not readily available beyond the local circuit or by agreement with specific agencies or units. The licensing worker is a middle-man which adds to the time and effort expended. We are proposing a system to enable workers to contact all prospective foster parents utilizing a mass alert. This will reduce time spent looking for placement, allow workers to care for children in a trauma informed manner and more efficiently manage their caseload in other aspects.

What is the root cause of the problem? (No more than 200 words)

Calling foster homes and emailing licensing workers for suggestions are the primary means of finding placement, which are time consuming activities for both the people maintaining the list of homes and those looking. Most circuits have policies requiring workers to call all local homes with openings and to reach out to surrounding counties first. Lack of availability of foster homes in local areas results in the need to contact families further away. When these methods fail, workers are forced to utilize emergency placements such as group homes or residential facilities which are not least restrictive, trauma sensitive, or cost effective. In an informal survey of the southeast region, frontline workers reported an average of 6.7 hours spent looking for placement. It was noted that securing placement for older youth and children with behaviors often required 8 hours or more. Commonly, the need for placement arises due to after-hours emergencies when kids enter care or their placement disrupts and few staff are available to assist. The current online database for finding foster homes is cumbersome, inaccurate, and most workers do not know how to access it.

What is your proposed solution? (No more than 200 words)

Our proposed solution is a mass communication website/app. Once foster homes become licensed, the licensing worker would give them access to the website/app on which they would set up their profile and indicate when they would want notification. For example, number of siblings, age of children, what location they are from and whether travel would be required, etc. The foster parent would be responsible for updating their information regarding notifications and the licensing worker would have override ability to place them on hold or delete their account if the license was placed on hold or revoked. Workers looking for placement would be able to enter a summary of the need for placement along with the number, ages, gender of children and send out the info to everyone that meets those notification parameters, all in one action. Foster parents would then respond to the website/app with a negative or positive response. Positive responses would be sent to the worker looking for placement, either positive or negative responses would be recorded for the foster home record.

Which area of impact is your primary focus? (No more than 10 words)

Streamlining placement of foster children and communication with foster families.

What is your primary measure for impact?

Primary measure	**Current Status**	**Target**
Time it takes to find placement	In an informal survey of the southeast region, frontline workers reported an average of 6.7 hours spent looking for placement. It was noted that securing placement for older youth and children with behaviors often required 8 hours or more.	The time it takes to find placement will be reduced by a minimum of 40%.
Children's experience during the process	Youth often lack the attention and comfort of the worker while they are waiting for placement and overhear conversations that may cause emotional distress and additional trauma.	Children will have an improved experience during the placement process as a result of increased attention from the worker.
Cost of overall agency function	Children are placed in more expensive and restrictive temporary placements. Increase to personnel costs through overtime and the need for assistance from multiple workers leading to a decrease in worker efficiency and retention.	Children will be placed in the most cost efficient and least restrictive placement. Fewer workers will be needed at one time, less overtime will be accrued, and workers will experience increased efficiency and job satisfaction.

** Measures should follow SMART principle: Specific-Measurable-Actionable-Relevant-Time bound.*

OA's guidance on performance metrics

Project Plan

What are the major activities and milestones to deliver your solution? (Additional steps may be added)

	Activity	Milestone or deliverable	Due date
1	*Identify and evaluate mass communication systems for availability and cost*	*Selecting the most appropriate mass communication system*	*30 days after project start date*
2	Acquire relevant approvals from state office for funding, contracts, and implementation.	Mass communication system has been funded and contracted with the State of Missouri.	120 day goal, but this will be dependent on the state approval process.
3	Develop policies and protocols for use.	Written protocols approved for implementation.	30 days from procurement.
4	Training staff and foster parents on how to use the system.	Every circuit will have at least one worker trained on how to use the system, and every foster parent will have at least 1 opportunity to attend a training.	With WebEx options, this could be done within 30 days of the policies and protocols being approved.
5	Go live with the system.	Workers will be using the new system to find placements.	60 days from the training completion.
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Required Resources and Support

What is the expected project duration? Choose one from the list below.

Long term (> 6 months)

How many people will be required to finish the project in the given duration? Choose one from the list below.

Large (>6 people)

Does your project require any specialized skills to complete? If so, explain. (No more than 100 words)

We will need OA to develop logistics for implementation, negotiate a contract, and purchase the service. We will also need DLS to develop policy regarding confidentiality compliance. Additional assistance and support will be needed from Central Office and the training unit.

Does your project require any statutory change to complete? If so, explain. (No more than 100 words)

No.

Can you implement your project with your current resources? If not, explain. (No more than 50 words)

Strongly recommended: Provide a cost breakdown in your additional materials.

No. We currently do not have access to a system capable of performing the desired task. Current resources used by other state agencies may be repurposed for our use, lowering the cost of the overall project.

Are there other factors critical to design and implement your project? (No more than 50 words)

Cooperation and compliance from organizations and individuals with state contracts.

Additional Materials

Please list any additional materials you have provided.

	Brief description
1	PowerPoint Presentation
2	Survey Results Data Sheet
3	Return on Investment Data Sheet

C.A.P. – Calling All Placements

Executive Summary

The Calling All Placements, CAP, Alert will utilize a mass communication system to quickly contact potential foster homes when a new placement is needed, reducing the trauma to children, the frequency of more expensive placement types, and worker overtime while increasing employee productivity and improving the experience of children and foster families.

Problem

The members of our team have personally experienced and have observed others staying in the office overnight with children coming into foster care or experiencing placement disruptions. We realized that the current method of calling individual foster homes from local listings is inefficient and time consuming. According to the data we collected through a survey of frontline staff, the average time a worker spends looking for placement is 6.7 hours. Several workers commented that assistance from additional staff was also required. Information about foster home openings is not readily available beyond the local circuit or by agreement with specific agencies or units. The licensing worker is a middle-man which adds to the time and effort extended. If a child enters a short-term, emergency placement, multiple emails are often sent seeking placement over a period of days and weeks to find permanent placement. Each month, over 100 of these emails are sent statewide. Children waiting in an office, police station, or hospital for placement are uncomfortable, anxious, and scared. These situations often occur after office hours or on weekends with limited staff available to help. This sometimes results in children sleeping on office chairs or pallets on the floor and overhearing the worker calling foster homes repeatedly describing them and their abuse or neglect situation, and adding to their trauma. Compensatory time for multiple workers is often required, adding to worker retention issues and labor costs. Compensatory time is currently being paid out regularly to Children's Division staff.

Solution

Our solution is to utilize a mass communication website or application to contact traditional foster homes when placement with relatives or kin is not possible. With this "Calling All Placements" Alert system, one Children's Division worker would be able to notify all of Missouri's traditional foster homes of the need for placement within minutes through app alert, text, or recorded message call. Foster parent profile preferences and geographic distribution groups would target the most appropriate placement options. A two way communication component would allow foster parents to be able to respond if they are available for placement. Children's Division's current website for foster parents and ongoing regional and state staff meetings could be utilized for providing training about the system.

Benefits

The C.A.P. Alert system will improve the experience of both children and staff by reducing the amount of time that children wait for placement and allowing staff to better attend to the physical and emotional needs of children. This will reduce worker stress and increase workers' job satisfaction, thereby increasing worker retention. Additional benefits will also be realized, including but not limited to:

- Streamlined communication between Children's Division staff and foster parents will empower foster parents to regulate when they receive requests for placement and the parameters of their notifications.
- Lessening the strain on Children's Division staff related to secondary trauma and overtime will improve staff retention and better cost efficiency related to hiring and training.
- Shortening the length of time required to find appropriate placement will reduce trauma to children resulting in decreased service costs related to treatment for unhealthy coping responses and mental health supports and services.
- Decreasing the use of short term emergency placements will reduce the per diem cost of placements and improve placement stability which is a marker for federal funds reimbursement.
- In addition, future applications of the CAP Alert system would increase the return on investment including notifications regarding foster parent training, respite and social events, adoption recruitment, and emergency response communications.
- Other Missouri Departments would be able to evaluate customizing this system for their individual needs.

MISSOURI CHILDREN'S DIVISION

C.A.P. ALERT SYSTEM

"Calling All Placements"

Survey Results

PLACEMENT PROCESS SURVEY

A statewide survey was conducted of frontline Children's Division staff and Foster Parents in order to gather information and feedback related to difficulties and concerns with the current process of finding foster placements. 107 frontline workers and 145 foster parents responded bet ween the dates of August 10 and August 30, 2022. Below is a summary of the data collected.

82%

of CD workers agreed the experience of waiting for placement has a negative emotional impact on children and youth

6.7

Hours

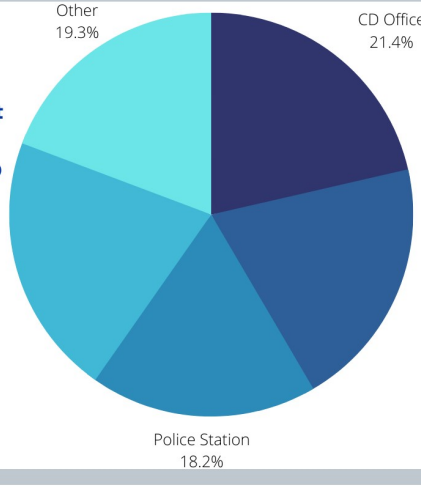
Average time CD staff spend looking for placement

- 58 % of CD workers reported spending 8+ hours on average looking for placement
- 53% stated children's age, behaviors, or special needs can increase time spent
- 47% reported spending days, weeks, or even months looking for a placement

98 %

of Children's Division staff reported the placement process requiring the attention or 2 or more employees

Most common locations children wait while placement is being found according to CD workers



95%

of traditional foster parents answered "yes' or "maybe' when asked if they would be willing to use a mass communication system.

- 91 % of CD staff reported having inaccurate information on available foster homes
- 69% of foster parents reported these inaccuracies affected the placement requests they did or did not receive
- Several respondents mentioned finding out about placements through Facebook or WhatsApp groups

82 % OF CD STAFF & 30 % OF FOSTER PARENTS

reported a foster child making statements about the emotional impact of the placement process

- **27 % of CD staff and 14 % of foster parents reported hearing statements about feeling "unwanted" or "unseen"**
- **47% of CD staff and 25 % of foster parents reported hearing statements about children feeling anxious or confused**

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

EMPLOYEE RETENTION

Currently, Children's Division's turnover rate is at **42%** with 1-4 years being our highest average tenure. The cost for a new worker, based on a 10 week training period, totals at **$16,332.80** according to the information provided from Office of Administration. A study completed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs shows that **"stress"** and **"emotional exhaustion"** are two variables that most affected caseworkers' intention to leave their employment. When asked about the current process of trying to find placement, worker's stated:

- "[Looking for placement] makes me extremely frustrated and contributes to feelings of burnout."
- "[Looking for placement] feels like having to call [foster parents], knowing there are no options, but still having to call. It feels hopeless. It's hard on the youth who have to sit next to me and hear all those 'no's' and it's hard on me, too. I've had more than one teen cry because they just want a family and there is nothing I can do."

COSTS OF EMERGENCY PLACEMENTS

When we are unable to locate long term traditional placements for children timely, they are placed in short-term, higher rate emergency placements, remain in expensive and restrictive residential or hospital placements, or have to stay in the state offices with workers overnight. On August 31st, 2022 there were **198** children in emergency placements which costs the state **$17,821.77** for that one day. Placing these same children in traditional placements for that one day would only total **$3, 618.82**, a total savings of **$14,202.95 for that one day**.

FEDERAL REIMBURSEMENT

Placement stability is a federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) requirement. It is measured in two ways. First is a data profile measure determined based on the number of placement moves that children in foster care experience. The current benchmark is a placement rate of **4.48** moves per 1,000 days in foster care or less. Missouri's rate of placement as of February, 2022 is **5.61**.

The second measure is gathered through case reviews by assessing whether placement moves were made to further the child's case goal and if the child's current placement is stable. In April of 2022, Missouri's CFSR benchmark for this measure was a strength rating of **83%**. Missouri ended this review with a performance of **76%**. Because this benchmark was not met, Missouri is currently in a period of fiscal penalty, resulting in a **1% reduction** of federal Title IV-B and Title IV-E dollars provided to the state, totaling over **$500,000.**

MISSOURI CHILDREN'S DIVISION
C.A.P. ALERT SYSTEM
"Calling All Placements"

The Problem

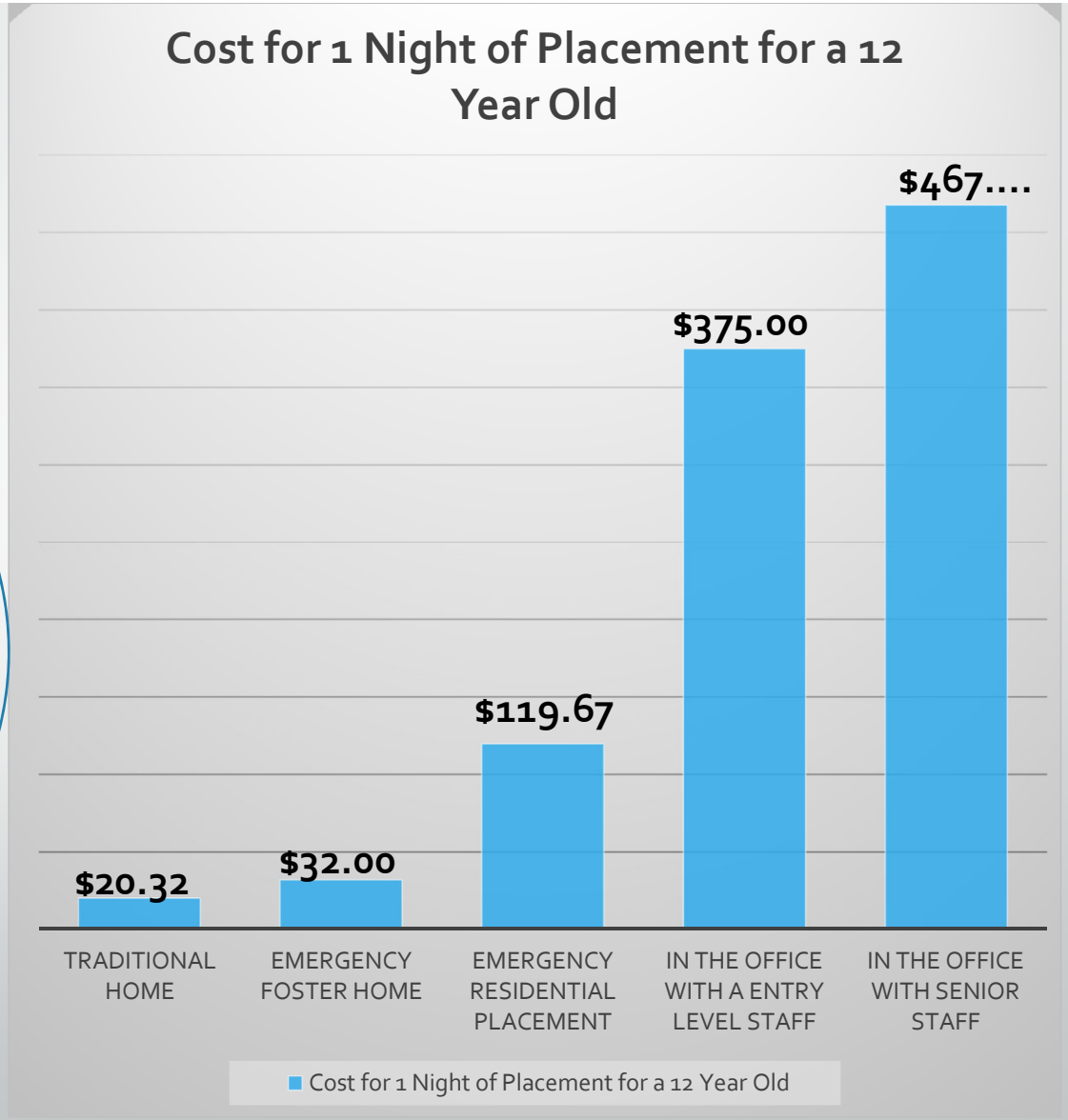
Workers can spend 8 or more hours looking for placement for children in a traditional foster home

- Calling families individually to ask about possible placement
- Inability to access all available foster homes
- Children wait in substandard places

The Impact

"…The worst part of the placement process EVERY time is having to sit near the worker as they called dozens of homes, knowing that every additional call meant the people before also didn't want me."

-Former Foster Youth/Foster Parent

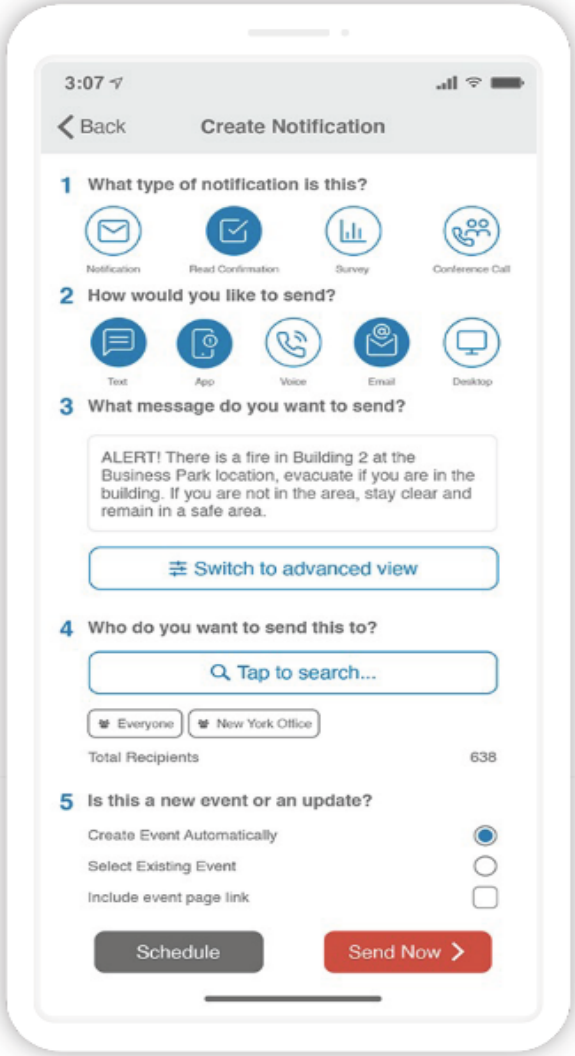


The Solution

- **Mass Communication System**
  - Ability to reach all foster homes in Missouri within minutes
  - Email, text, recorded call, or app notifications
  - 2 way communication for responses
  - User preference settings for foster parents
  - Multiple administrators across circuit and regions
  - Dashboard to manage and document requests and responses
  - Ability to send notifications based on geographic location

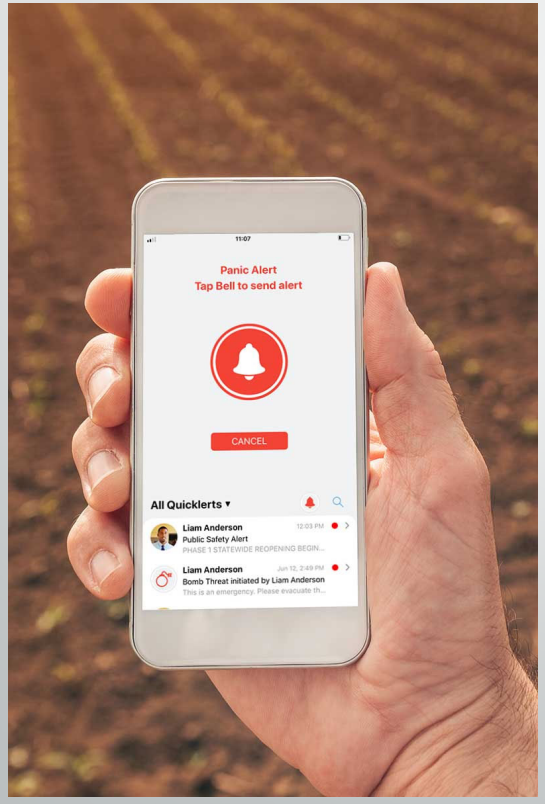
*Screenshot from AlertMedia Presentation

Send a message in seconds from scratch or use a template

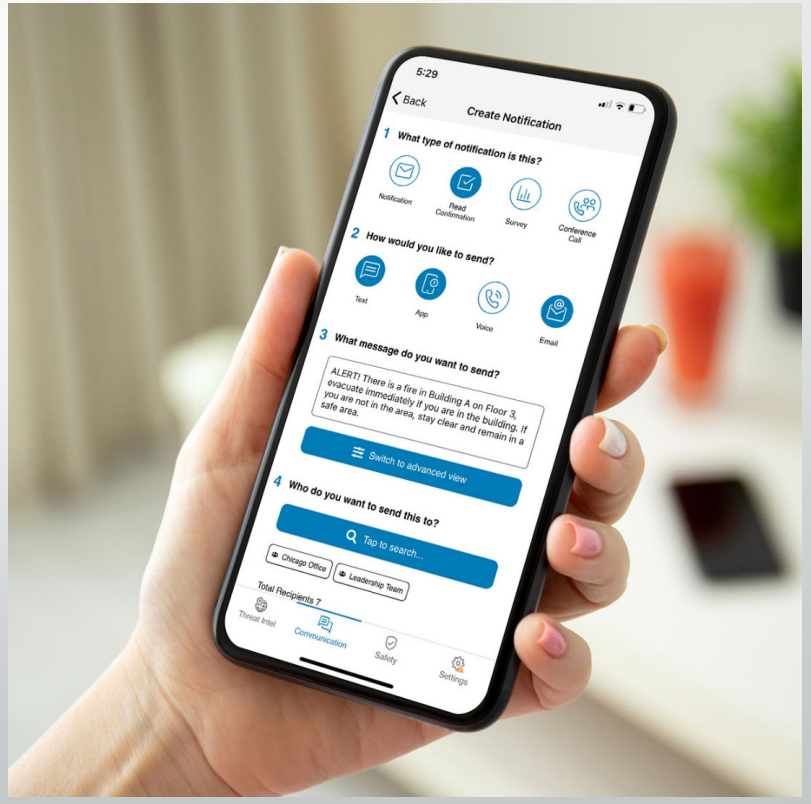


The Options

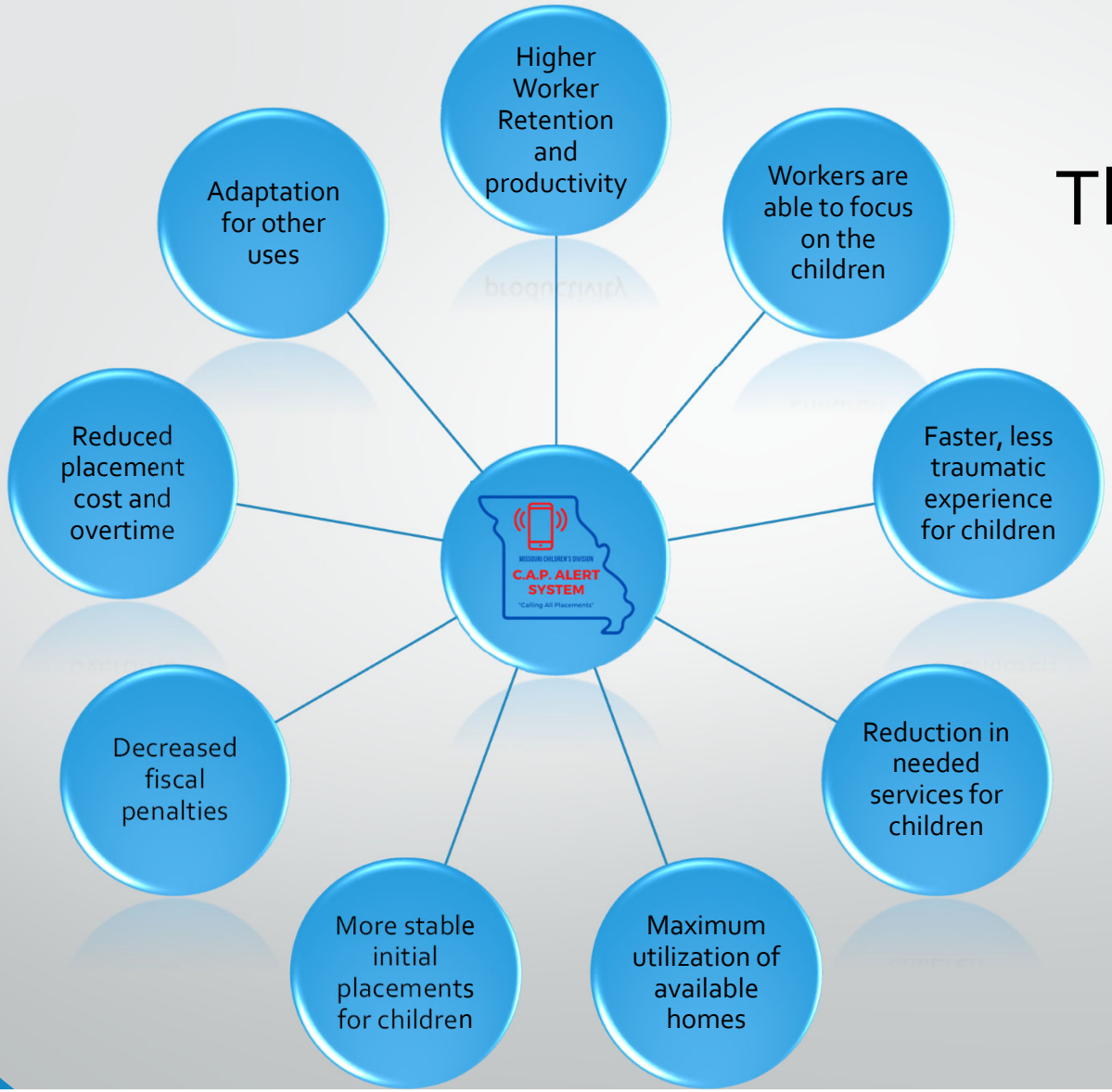
Quicklert



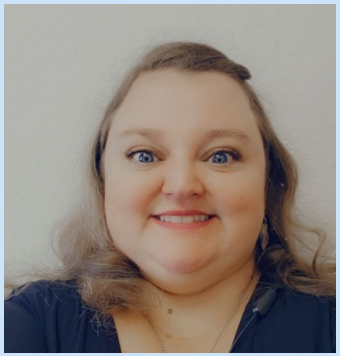
AlertMedia



The Benefits



Our Team

Alisha Otis	Elizabeth "Beth" Atkinson	Anthea Montes	Brittany Robbins	Anajanette "Angie" Sloan
				
• Senior Social Services Specialist • 24 years	• Social Services Specialist • 5 years	• Social Services Unit Supervisor • 8 years	• Senior Social Services Specialist • 10 years	• Social Services Specialist • 22 years

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