

Children's Mercy Launches Incentivized Trusted Network to Support Children and Families



About Children's Mercy Kansas City

Children's Mercy Kansas City is a leading independent children's hospital system dedicated to holistic care, translational research, breakthrough innovation, and educating the next generation of caregivers.

Since 2020, Children's Mercy and findhelp have been working together to fully integrate social care resources and referrals into provider workflows. Through their findhelp platform, [Lift Up KC](#), over 12,000 navigators and patients have completed more than 50,000 searches, made over 3,000 connections, and placed more than 1,400 referrals to nonprofits.

Children's Mercy started working with findhelp in 2020; since then, they have built a successful incentivized trusted network of strong partnerships with five local community organizations, utilizing internal funds and community benefit grant dollars to support the work. Through these supportive community partnerships, from January 2022 through March 2023, 336 patients were referred to and received assistance with housing, utilities, food resources, and more, with a 91.1% closed-loop rate.

Challenges

In early 2020, Children's Mercy's clinically-integrated networks of 34 community primary care practices started screening their 275,000+ patients for social needs, but providers did not have clear next steps to address positive screenings. This presented an ethical issue for staff and left families' needs unmet.

Most providers did not know where to start when it came to seeking resources for their patients and families. Care coordinators and social workers maintained personal resource lists on paper or in electronic files, but these were not widely available. To connect patients with resources, social workers would call or email an organization from their list; connections were informal, not always recorded in a standardized way, and there was little feedback about whether or not the patient actually received care. Additionally, many community practices do not have social work or care coordination resources, so no connections were being made.

Before Implementing findhelp

- **Lack of standardized process** to connect patients and families to resources.
- **Lack of knowledge** of available resources in the community.

Before implementing a Trusted Network

- Not many organizations were **proactively "closing the loop"**, so users did not see the value of making referrals.
- Some users did not trust that **referrals were reaching community organizations**.

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Honestly, I was pretty skeptical about social needs screening — it felt like it was one more thing to do. But having access to Lift Up KC has been a huge benefit. We have a high-risk population. We know there are many issues, but being a Medicaid practice we don't always have extra staff to help with social need referrals. With Lift Up KC, I can actually help patients who tell me that they are getting evicted or they're sleeping on a friend's couch. I use Lift Up KC right there in the room with the patient – it doesn't take long. I fill out the referral form and I tell the family the name of the agency who will be reaching out so they know what to expect. The whole process takes about 30 seconds. A few patients have followed up with me to tell me that the referral I sent helped them pay their rent or prevented them from being evicted. It doesn't matter what I tell them to do [about their diagnosis] if they are worried about where their next meal is going to come from.”

Children's Mercy Network Primary Care Provider

How findhelp Supports Children's Mercy: Building an Incentivized Trusted Community Network

Findhelp provides both a platform for local community partners to offer wraparound services specifically for Children's Mercy's patients and families, and a way for their navigators to directly connect with these programs.

To enable stronger connections to community organizations and help their users trust the platform, Children's Mercy created partnerships with five local community-based organizations (CBOs): Bishop Sullivan, El Centro, Metro Lutheran Ministry, Community Assistance Council, and Community Services League.

CBO Partner Obligations

- Accept and respond to referrals through the findhelp platform.
- Meet monthly with Children's Mercy to work together on improving the process.

Support from Children's Mercy

- Provided unrestricted funding in a lump sum at the beginning of the partnership; the CBOs could use the funds as they saw fit to support their operations.
- Created a Children's Mercy-specific program for each of the partners and featured them as a “Referral Partners” on Lift Up KC.
- Educated 39 departments and 34 primary care practices within the Children's Mercy Clinically Integrated Networks about the Referral Partners and the value of referring patients to them.

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Lift Up KC is easy and efficient to use. Our CBO partner has been a one-stop shop for our patients who live in Clay & Platte Counties. We also appreciate seeing the closed-loop status to know what happened to the patient's care.”

Children's Mercy Staff Navigator



Overcoming Challenges

Children's Mercy framed these partnerships with the five community organizations as a learning experience; they knew there would be moments where they'd have to step back to reevaluate and adapt their approach. To facilitate process improvement, they hold monthly meetings with the participating organizations to discuss patient referrals, current challenges, and potential improvements. In community partnerships, Children's Mercy learned that it is important to continuously seek feedback and be empathetic and responsive when issues arise – what it means to be a good partner.

Miscommunication

Some challenges the CBOs encountered are related to miscommunication: receiving referrals they're unable to address, referrals for patients who seemed unaware that they were being referred, and not receiving the right details. The key to solving most of these issues was reeducating and communicating with Children's Mercy navigators. Leadership conducted targeted education to specific users, initiated a 39-department roadshow to educate staff, and sent out bimonthly Lift Up KC newsletters.

Uneven Referral Distribution

Another challenge Children's Mercy encountered was unequal referral volumes; one of the five CBO partners received a majority of the referrals (three times as many as some of the other partners). To address this, Children's Mercy added an additional partner in the service area and worked with an existing partner to expand their nearby location to help share the load.

Despite these challenges, Children's Mercy has shared that their branded findhelp site is significantly better than using paper resource lists which might be out-of-date or using websites that don't accept referrals.



We value findhelp's flexibility, ability to meet CBOs where they are, prioritization of seeker privacy, and the up-to-date program information."

Michelle Manaskie, Assistant Director of Operations & Population Health Management, Children's Mercy

Patient Success Story



A Children's Mercy **patient is screened** for social needs and shares that her family's housing situation is unstable.



A community practice provider asks if the family would like to be **connected to resources** via Children's Mercy's findhelp platform, Lift Up KC.



The family meets with a Lift Up KC navigator who **refers them to Metro Lutheran Ministry**, one of Children's Mercy's trusted network referral partners.



Metro Lutheran **provides the family with rental and utilities** assistance and plans to continue checking in with the family.

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The medical assistant came to me and said there was a patient who needed housing resources. I met with the family after their visit with the doctor and provided them with a plan. I said first we will reach out to MLM. If they can't help, I have other options lined up. They were really scared because they were potentially going to be evicted.”

Children's Mercy Provider

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I was very happy to talk about these needs. Embarrassed too, but I knew we needed to talk about it. The practice did a great job speaking with me about my needs and getting me help. We weren't aware that the practice would help us get resources. Getting help from MLM was an extremely easy and comfortable experience. They were so helpful and nice. I don't really know what else to say other than they were a godsend.”

Children's Mercy Patient

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The family came prepared with all their paperwork and within a few days of their referral, I was able to get them help with utilities & rent back pay. I set them up with some rental assistance for more recent months as well, but I am worried about that family. I plan to check back in and hopefully they know they can reach back out to us, too.”

Metro Lutheran Ministry Staff

Results, Return on Investment, and Future Plans

In June 2022, Children's Mercy set a goal for their users to send more than 100 referrals per month; in every month since July 2022, they've exceeded this goal. In March 2023, users on the platform more than doubled their goal by sending 210 referrals through Lift Up KC. Since launching their incentivized trusted network in January 2022 Children's Mercy has referred more than 1,128 patients to partner organizations (as of March 2023). Their current priority is to figure out why many of the referred patients end up being difficult to contact or uninterested in receiving services. Throughout 2023, they will be assessing opportunities to improve patient education regarding referrals and transportation services to CBOs.

Overall, partnering with findhelp reduced the need for staff to maintain personal resource lists or individual instances of CMH staff contacting each CBO via phone or email. These incentivized trusted network partnerships were critical to earning user trust and driving interest in using the Lift Up KC platform. Children's Mercy users recognized these partners as reputable and reliable resources in the community and were excited for the ability to refer to them using Lift Up KC. The closed-loop communication provided by their partner organizations was also a game changer to promote the value of the technology — it's extremely helpful to have a CBO staff member on the other side of the program to help a patient obtain resources and make sure referral statuses are up to date.

In the future, Children's Mercy hopes to partner with additional CBOs and expand their Incentivized Network to serve patients in the counties surrounding the Kansas City metro area. By continuing to partner with findhelp's community engagement team, they will enhance collaboration between their existing CBO partners and align with other Kansas City organizations doing related work to address the social drivers of health (SDoH).



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