

December 4, 2018

*The following information is being provided by Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) Secretary Gina Meier-Hummel to update the Child Welfare System Task Force on the agency.*

## **Chairwoman Schmidt, Vice Chair Davis and Members of the Committee:**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today. I know the Child Welfare System Task Force has several recommendations to review and prioritize, so I will be brief in my update. As was requested at the last Child Welfare System Task Force meeting, attached you will find a handout with all of the recommendations with updated policy references and information. For your convenience, we have highlighted the recommendations that have been updated or changed. At the end, we have also included a link to our Prevention and Protection Services (PPS) policies online. While you have that attachment, and I hope it is a helpful resource to you, I know your time is valuable, so I will continue to move through my testimony as you look over that document.

## **Child Welfare Grants and Contract**

DCF recently announced the new child welfare grantees. The new Case Management grant was divided into eight catchment areas, whereas in the current structure, there are only four catchment areas. The new Case Management providers are:

- Catchment Area 1—Saint Francis Ministries (previously known as Saint Francis Community Services)
- Catchment Area 2—Saint Francis Ministries
- Catchment Area 3—KVC Kansas
- Catchment Area 4—TFI
- Catchment Area 5—Cornerstones of Care
- Catchment Area 6—KVC Kansas
- Catchment Area 7—Saint Francis Ministries
- Catchment Area 8—TFI

The Family Preservation grant catchment areas will continue to align with the four DCF Regions—West, Wichita, Kansas City and East. The new Family Preservation providers are:

- West Region—Eckerd Connects
- Wichita Region—Eckerd Connects
- East Region—Eckerd Connects
- Kansas City Region—Cornerstones of Care

Attached you will find a Case Management and a Family Preservation map with the catchment areas, illustrating the areas each provider will cover.

I understand there has been some criticism about the new providers, so I wanted to reassure you, these decisions were not made lightly. DCF awarded the new child welfare grants following an extensive and robust review process. Two internal DCF teams, consisting of DCF staff from across the state, analyzed and blind-scored each bid submission offsite for three days at the end of August. The agency then entered negotiations with bidders in September, and continued internal discussions into October. Each of the new providers has a strong, proven track record of providing quality services to Kansas children and families. Tomorrow, DCF will be holding a joint press conference with all of the providers to discuss the backgrounds of each provider, and address some of the concerns that have been raised.

Recognizing the importance of a smooth transition between providers, the agency has already been working diligently on transition plans since the grants were announced a month ago. DCF staff and providers recently met to start moving forward with the transition plans. The transition plans include dedicated teams in each region, who will work with the providers in their catchment areas to transition. There will also be a transition team housed within administration who will oversee the transitions from a global standpoint. Throughout the transition process, it is DCF's number one priority to ensure a continuity of quality services for Kansas children and families. While transitions can be intimidating, and the new child welfare grants include substantial changes, the changes were absolutely necessary to truly improve child welfare in Kansas. As I've previously discussed, these changes were based on feedback we received from stakeholders and were made to improve quality services to Kansas children and families and oversight, eliminate conflicts of interest and provide client-centered care and needs-based services. In addition to the transition plans, DCF has started constructing the revamped grant oversight process. Moving forward, there will be a dedicated division overseeing the grants with a 360-degree child welfare lens. This 360-degree approach includes evaluating case-specific information, analyzing outcomes, data financial reporting and analyzing the grants systematically as well.

The Placement Matching System contract, which we awarded to Five Points Technology, Inc., is another vital piece of how our agency will be moving differently in the future. This contract will require every licensed foster home or residential bed, to be entered into a single system, regardless of which Child Placing Agency (CPA) sponsors the home. Additionally, this system will capture the placement abilities and characteristics. This new system will ensure foster homes, who can meet a child's needs, will be called, regardless of sponsoring agency.

Five Points Technology, Inc., has 20 years of experience in integrating and creating custom technology solutions for government agencies, non-profit companies and health and human service organizations. They have created and implemented similar products in four states and 10 child welfare agencies. Overall, they have vast experience collaborating with multiple stakeholders in a child welfare system, with clients in 15 states across the nation. DCF is excited to partner with Five Points Technology, Inc., as the Placement Matching System will provide the State much-need data about youth in care. Most importantly, the Placement Matching system will help stabilize placement for youth in care, increase foster parent capacity and facilitate timely permanency for Kansas youth.

## **Adoptions**

During one of our last meetings, DCF informed the Child Welfare System Task Force about the agency's many initiatives to increase the number of adoptions and improve timely permanency. One of the initiatives we discussed was DCF's 30, 60 and 90-day adoption plans. During these plans, staff have reviewed all cases where youth are awaiting adoption to achieve permanency and they have created working plans to finalize the adoptions in 30, 60 or 90 days. Since the agency announced the adoption working plans in October, we have finalized approximately 319 adoptions. We anticipate finalizing more than 250 adoptions in the next two months. The agency is on track to finalize the 1,500 adoptions we had originally projected to finalize.

In addition, November was National Adoption Month. Throughout the month, DCF participated in numerous Adoption Month events and finalizations. I, myself, had the opportunity to attend finalizations in Wyandotte County, but DCF staff attended events across the state, including finalizations in Topeka, Olathe, Wichita and others. Having witnessed thousands of adoptions during my 26-year career in Kansas child welfare, these finalizations are still moving and important to witness. During National Adoption Month, more than 220 adoptions were finalized across the state of Kansas. While DCF pursues timely permanency for youth all year long, National Adoption Month serves as a time to recognize the need for more adoptive families and celebrate adoption finalizations.

## **Operation Hope/Missing and Runaway Youth Sweeps**

Locating missing and runaway youth has been one of the agency's top priorities since I arrived at DCF a year ago. During the week of Nov. 12, 2018, DCF participated in a sweep, Operation Hope, with the Office of Inspector General (OIG), KBI and other law enforcement to locate missing and runaway youth. DCF helped with the planning of the operation and the search itself. During the sweep, we located 18 youth and established leads for the whereabouts of numerous other youth as well. DCF will continue to partner with federal and State agencies, local law enforcement, providers and other community partners to locate missing and runaway youth. One child away from placement is one too many, and these at-risk youth will continue to be a top priority. DCF is one of a few, if not the only state actively looking for these youth. Moving forward, it is the agency's intent to continue to strengthen our investigative searches and our relationship with law enforcement and other partners to best help these youth.

As of Nov. 29, 2018, there were 55 verified runaways. This is the lowest the number has been since the agency started tracking this population. Whereas previously, on Aug. 31, 2017, there were 87 missing and runaway youth.

## Updated DCF Numbers

To continue being forthcoming and transparent with all our stakeholders, including the Child Welfare System Task Force, below are some updated child welfare numbers:

- Children in Out of Home Care—As of 10/31/18, there were 7,539 children in out of home placement, an increase of nine youth since DCF last provided numbers to the task force in October.
- Child Protection Specialist Vacancy Rate—As of 11/19/18, the child protection specialist vacancy rate was 8.97 percent, a 2 percent decrease since DCF last provided numbers to the task force in October.
- Risk Removal Staffing's—Since Sept. 5, 2018, there have been 174 staffing's. 86 youth have been diverted from entering foster care. This leaves the Risk Removal Staffing's with a diversion rate of 49 percent.

The Child Protection Specialist vacancy rate, and especially the Risk Removal Staffing numbers illustrate real, forward movement for Kansas children and families.

## Other Child Welfare Updates

As we have discussed a new Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) several times before, I felt it was pertinent to provide you an update on our progress with the federal government. As you will remember, DCF was required to submit a CCWIS Planning Advance Planning Document (PAPD) to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to receive a 50/50 match on federal funds. After responding to a handful of questions, DCF was notified on Nov. 14, 2018, that our PAPD was approved. As part of the federal governments requirements, DCF is now in the process of going through an extensive planning process to help solidify a new CCWIS system for Kansas. This planning process includes posting a Request for Proposal (RFP), which DCF will soon do, to help acquire a planning contractor. We anticipate the RFP will be released in January 2019.

Additionally, DCF continues to move forward to implement the Family First Prevention Services Act to bring comprehensive, evidence-based prevention to Kansas. To our knowledge, we are one of a few states actively pursuing this legislation at this time.

## Conclusion

Thank you for allowing me to provide an update on the agency. Please be assured that I have and will continue to be open, forthright and transparent with the task force so that together, we can make real changes and improvements. The agency, nor myself, will shy away from our responsibility in improving the systems before us. Looking back on a year at the agency, I am proud to say that we have seen positive, forward movement for the children and families of Kansas. While we have seen many improvements, there is still much work to be done. I am very appreciative to the Child Welfare System Task

Force for coming alongside the agency to improve child welfare in Kansas. Child welfare is complex, difficult work that is controversial by nature, so I thank you for looking hard at the challenges before us. Thank you for the work you are doing on behalf of Kansas children and families. I will now gladly stand for questions.