



Secretary Gina Meier-Hummel's Leadership, December—March



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Safety and Prevention: Child safety is our number one priority at the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF). When I accepted this position, I knew there were some key things that needed to be done to address recent concerns about child safety in Kansas. Therefore, we have enacted several changes, moving purposefully to protect Kansas youth. These changes have included: personnel changes, an internal review of cases, proposing key policy and procedure changes and implementing further mandatory training for child welfare investigative staff. Another part of DCF's role in ensuring child safety is to timely and appropriately screen calls through the Kansas Protection Report Center (KPRC). We are strengthening our efforts to improve the KPRC, requiring quicker action to be taken, allowing social workers to get out and investigate sooner. We are also in the process of finalizing a policy change that requires alleged victims of abuse or neglect, under the age of six, to be seen by a social worker in their home environment. Previously, they could be seen by a social worker at a DCF service center. Additionally, the policy change requires our staff to immediately contact and involve law enforcement if they are barred from entering a home. This policy change will take effect in April. Child safety is paramount, so we are continuing to evaluate and review systems, policies and procedures. I have a dedicated team looking at abuse and neglect trends in each region, so that we can properly address the unique, identified difficulties in each area.

Transparency: On my first day at the agency, I approached DCF's Legal Division to task them with finding ways for the agency to be more transparent and forthcoming with information. In response, we introduced legislation, in conjunction with Governor Jeff Colyer, that will increase the information we can share in the death of a child, as a result of abuse or neglect. Under House Bill 2728, in the event that child abuse or neglect results in a child fatality, the Secretary shall release the following information: age and sex of the child, date of the fatality, summary related to the department's processes and procedures of any previous reports of abuse or neglect received by the Secretary involving the child and the findings of any said reports and any department-recommended services provided for the child. This bill is vitally important because it will require future agency leadership to release this information. In the past, summaries have not been released by secretaries, which is at their discretion. This bill is as much about ensuring future transparency, as it is about here and now. In addition to introducing legislation, I have consistently been responsive to media interview requests. We are also working to improve communication with legislators, partners and the public to share work of the agency. Finally, with transparency as one of my top priorities, I approached each program area at DCF and asked them to submit written work plans, outlining their work and initiatives in their respective fields. These work plans are currently being used to create an online, interactive dashboard, demonstrating our progress toward agency goals. This dashboard will allow the public to track our efforts on the DCF website. We are also working to implement a page on the DCF public website that will illustrate the top-to-bottom review of the agency, and subsequent reforms that have come from that effort. Together, these two projects will increase accountability for our agency, and transparency with the public.

By the Numbers

Conducted **72** meetings with stakeholders

Met with **107** legislators

Made **14** key staff changes

Conducted **13** media interviews

Changed **5** policies



Top-to-Bottom Review: Internally, we have begun conducting a top-to-bottom review at the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF). This has included conducting internal interviews and reviewing policies and procedures. Additionally, we are currently meeting with the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Casey Family Programs to look at our systems. We will also partner with an outside vendor to help with the review, ensuring we are doing the right things for Kansas children and families. We anticipate making a decision on the outside vendor in the near future.

Accountability and Changed Culture: DCF exists to serve Kansans, therefore, we are emphasizing a renewed, increased focus on accountability and proper customer service to ensure we are doing what is right for Kansas children and families. This includes holding myself, DCF staff, contractors and other partners accountable for our words and actions. We want to be an agency of opportunity, so we are bringing more voices to the table, listening to staff and client concerns and being responsive to needs.

Staff Changes: In order to move forward and make significant changes, I have quickly surrounded myself with a fast-moving, reliable team. This has included 14 key personnel changes.

Runaway and Missing Youth and Children Sleeping Overnight in Offices: Runaway and youth missing from care continue to be a top priority for this agency. We now have a team of three qualified individuals dedicated to actively looking for these youth and ensuring their safety. Our team has more than 30 years of combined military and law enforcement experience and works diligently to find these youth. Additionally, we are working to buy emergency beds so that youth no longer sleep overnight in offices.

Social Worker Recruitment and Retention: To remedy workforce issues, DCF has done the following things to help with recruitment and retention:

- Increased the starting salary for social workers to \$40,000, and supervisors to \$44,000
- Increased DCF attendance at career fairs, including out-of-state career fairs
- Started posting open positions on Handshake, Indeed and DCF's Facebook page
- Worked with the Kansas Department of Commerce to recruit social workers
- Partnered with a headhunter organization to fill positions
- Started accepting social workers on a part-time basis and as temporary positions. These part-time social worker positions have increased dramatically since 2010.
- Increased the number of social work practicum students we take per region. Instead of allowing 10 each region, we now take 20 each region.
- Hosted on-site career fairs at our DCF service centers.
- Conducted regular outreach with universities to build rapport with the social worker programs, and to build a partnership between our agency and the university
- Pay for any social worker fees, including renewal of their license and continuing education units (CEUs).
- Implemented a contract allowing current employees, regardless of their position at the agency, to remain in their position while simultaneously working towards their practicum during work hours. This contract includes DCF reimbursing the individual for attending practicum courses and any mileage associated with driving to class.

In addition to these efforts, we are currently looking at new, creative ways to recruit and retain social workers.

Moving Forward: We will continue to emphasize all of the key areas above, as well as other program areas, to improve how we serve Kansans. Some of our key focuses will be implementing the Governor's Budget Enhancements, increasing permanency for youth in care, emphasizing Independent Living services for youth aging out of care, improving child welfare contracts, promoting work programs, increasing child support collections and empowering Kansans with disabilities to find competitive, integrated employment. Having been a social worker for more than 25 years, I truly understand how important it is that we get things right. I also understand that there certainly are issues within the system, and we must work to regain the public's trust. I am going to do that the best way I know how, rolling up my sleeves and going to work. We will continue to work on the issues before us and under my leadership, the agency will always be responsive to the needs of Kansans. With that being said, please do not hesitate to contact me or my office should you have any questions or concerns.

Contact information:

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Strong Families Make a Strong Kansas