

Rachel:

My name is Rachel Whitten. I am the Public Information Officer for The Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, which will soon become The Department for Children and Families. Along with the name change, our divisions are getting new names as well. Children and Family Services will become The Division of Prevention and Protection Services. So we are here today to talk about the name change and the new mission and vision going forward.

Gina, you are the director of the new Prevention and Protection Services. What is the most important thing for people to know about that division?

Gina:

The goal within our division is to work to keep families together. We get involved with families' lives because children, or someone in the community, are concerned about a child's safety. Our goal is to go out and assess the situation with the family and see if there are goals that are not being met, or see if there is something we can do to help shore up a family and their resources and meet their needs—with the goal of keeping children safely with their families.

Rachel:

Jim, your new title under The Department of Children and Families is Deputy Secretary for Family Services. Tell me what your goal is for the families that we work with.

Jim:

Our efforts are not alone. We have partners that we work with in the community, and our providers that we work very closely with in strengthening Kansas Families. We deal with many aspects of their wellbeing, not only physical but emotional; and those social connections in the community; and the family themselves, making sure they are connected with their children. We have a system right now that is more child-welfare based but we are going to be focused more on child wellbeing. And moving in that direction, we need very strong commitments and partnerships with those out in the community, and our providers as well.

Rachel:

So, Gina, as the director of Prevention and Protection Services, tell me how we work with the families that we serve.

Gina:

We come alongside families who have been brought to our attention and we look at what their needs are, and we try to address whatever needs they have, bringing their strengths to the table. We look at what community partnership exists out there, what community resources exist out there, what the faith-based community can bring to the family, and try to pool all of those resources together to help at-risk families. Certainly for children who cannot remain with their own biological family or with their own

family, we would have foster families or relatives who step in to intervene. We always want children to be in the least restrictive environment possible, and to be in the most family-like setting possible. If they can be safely maintained in their family and in their community, that is our goal. Certainly in the end, when we are done, we want families to be healthy and whole and in a better place than when we first intervened.

Rachel:

The protection of vulnerable adults is an important part of Prevention and Protection Services. Can you tell us about that program?

Gina:

The Protection Report Center receives calls where folks are concerned about vulnerable adults, and our social workers in the field go out and investigate those concerns and assess the adult's needs. When there is a need we work to help that adult find resources and meet those needs.

Jim:

We are so proud that here in Kansas we lead the entire nation in terms of a child being safe in foster care, which gives us an opportunity to focus on prevention and permanency: preventing child abuse and neglect before it ever occurs in the first place and, on the back end, permanency, which is either reunification with their family or getting a child adopted. We are excited for this opportunity moving forward to focus on prevention and permanency and working with our partners in the future.

Gina:

We are very proud of the work we do with vulnerable adults, children, and families. We want families to be safe and we want to work to keep families together.