

Kansas Department of

# **Social and Rehabilitation Services**

Janet Schalansky, Secretary

## **Joint Committee on Children's Issues**

October 30, 2003

### **Child Welfare Contract Extensions**

#### **Integrated Service Delivery**

Sandra Hazlett, Director of Children and Family Policy  
785-296-3271

For additional information contact:  
**Office of Governmental and Media Affairs**  
Tanya Dorf, Chief of Staff  
Docking State Office Building  
915 SW Harrison, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor North  
Topeka, Kansas 66612-1570  
phone: 785.296.3271  
fax: 785.296.4685  
[www.srskansas.org](http://www.srskansas.org)

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**Child Welfare Contract Extensions**

Rep. Landwehr and members of the committee, I am Sandra Hazlett, Director of Children and Family Policy for SRS. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Department's decision to extend child welfare contracts.

This past July, SRS invited child welfare stakeholders, foster parents, and current/former foster children to attend one of a series of 15 public meetings held in communities across the state; alternatively, they were invited to comment by e-mail or by letter. Participants were asked what they liked and what they would like to have changed in each child welfare program: family preservation, foster care, and adoption. They were asked to identify systemwide concerns; that is, aspects of child welfare that did not relate to any specific contract or program. Requests for input were also mailed directly to foster parents, family and grandparent advocacy organizations, current and former foster children, members of the judicial system and other attorneys who work with children and families, CASA, independent living organizations, members of the Kansas state legislature, community mental health centers, CDDOs, and substance abuse treatment centers, as well as contractors, subcontractors, and other state agencies. The meetings were also publicized in the media with the hope parents and members of the public might also attend.

Attendance at these meetings totaled more than 350 participants. The composition of the audience and concerns raised, varied widely. Comments from each meeting were recorded and analyzed by the Child Welfare Contracts Steering Committee. Comments from the e-mails and letters were included in this analysis.

**Summary and Conclusions**

- Family preservation. The most prevalent concern was about expanding the program. Although concerns were also raised about the transition between family preservation and foster care services, they were not critical of family preservation, but advocated continuing family preservation services alongside foster care services or after reunification.
- Foster care. Comments indicated services have improved. Foster home recruitment and management, communication and information sharing, and case planning and service provision were noted as areas needing improvement. A number of attendees suggested changes in the foster care and adoption contracts, both to address problems with transitioning foster children between the two programs and to improve planning for youth who are viewed as less likely to be adopted.

- Adoption Services. Comments about improved collaboration and achieving outcomes was positive. Areas for improvement include staff coverage and performance, responsiveness to prospective adoptive parents, and services for older youth and children with special needs.

Foster home recruitment and management were strong themes throughout discussions. Issues about the recruitment, payment, and management of foster homes as a resource seem to complicate relationships between contractors and other subcontractors and make appropriate placement decisions more difficult.

Several other themes recurred in more than one program area:

- Provision of mental health services and access to the medical card are not handled consistently between the three programs; this is viewed as a problem when it limits choice of service provider or requires a change that might be unnecessary if access were uniform
- Staff turnover, performance, and training needs were mentioned as concerns in all programs
- Additional clarification of roles and expectations for all partners was requested
- Court relationships, expectations, and information requirements are of concern in all three programs, although their focus is different
- A continuing lack of certain child welfare resources was reflected in comments about the adequacy of community services, needs for other specific services, and needed flexibility for providers of services in Western Kansas
- Comments about additional independent living services, better decisions about adoption referrals, and better planning for youth with special needs reflect a growing concern about finding better ways to help youth who may not have permanent families transition to adulthood
- Outcomes and performance monitoring requirements were topics of concern for each program and systemwide

The 15 community meetings provided a wide range of comments about the child welfare system and its current programs, from participants with varied roles and perspectives. Those comments reflected a number of themes for the Steering Committee to consider.

The Steering Committee's responsibility is to guide agency efforts in developing the RFPs and new contracts, and to make recommendations to the Secretary. Steering Committee membership includes deputy secretaries, key program directors, operations directors and area representatives.

After careful study, the Steering Committee determined the changes to be considered are significant enough to warrant a one-year delay in the start date for the next round of contracts.

The Department's vision for children and families during the next contract period is to continue our efforts to build a child welfare system that is safe, secure, and stable; family-centered, connected to community, and relies on evidence-based practices. The Steering Committee has identified some areas of the current public/private partnership that need revision in order to achieve our vision for children and families, and some areas where we want to raise the bar on the successes already being achieved.

The key areas of concern that have been identified include:

- program structure
- quality and array of services and best practice
- balancing financial structure, accountability and outcomes
- balancing competition and collaboration
- managing contract transitions

SRS has asked contractors to work with us and use the opportunity the extension provides to thoroughly explore ways of improving child welfare services in Kansas. As a current contractor, ideas about the specific changes that will be the most effective in improving the Kansas child welfare system are extremely valuable. SRS will use an additional, more focused process to allow contractors to share their ideas with us and members of an Advisory Team before we enter the stages of a formal RFP process that preclude such a free interchange of ideas.

A Solicitation for Information describing specific input SRS is seeking to help develop specifications for the pending RFP, has been mailed to current child welfare contractors. Contractors have been invited to orally present their response to the Steering Committee in December. To augment the Steering Committee's perspective during this Solicitation for Information, SRS assembled a Child Welfare Contracts Advisory Committee which includes interested individuals who are knowledgeable about the child welfare system, but do not have a specific contracting role, and who will be precluded from developing bids in response to the upcoming Child Welfare Services Request for Proposals. They will also hear the presentations from contractors in December, and participate in analyzing and making recommendations to the Steering Committee based on these presentations.

RFP's are scheduled to be released in May 2004, with responses due in September 2004. Contracts will be awarded in January 2005 with a July 2005 start date.

This concludes my overview of the child welfare contract extensions, and I would be happy to stand for any questions.