



## KANSAS LEGISLATIVE DIVISION *of* POST AUDIT

The Rundown podcast transcript for Performance Audit report titled ***Consistency Across Foster Care Service Providers (Limited-Scope)*** – Released January 2020

**Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager:** [00:00]

From the Kansas Legislative Division of Post Audit, this is The Rundown. Your source for news and updates from LPA including performance audits recently released to the Kansas Legislature. I'm Brad Hoff. In January 2020, Legislative Post Audit released a limited-scope performance audit reviewing the consistency across foster care service providers. I'm with Meghan Flanders, Senior Auditor at Legislative Post Audit, who supervised the audit. Meghan, welcome to The Rundown and thanks for taking the time to discuss this audit with me.

**Meghan Flanders, Senior Auditor and Supervisor:** [00:38]

Thank you.

**Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager:** [00:38]

So, before we discuss the audit, I think it's important for our listeners to understand that this is a limited-scope audit. So, please explain what a limited scope audit is and how it differs from the standard performance audit that LPA produces.

**Meghan Flanders, Senior Auditor and Supervisor:** [00:55]

Yeah, so a limited scope audit is an audit that we do in about 100 hours, so about two and a half weeks from start to finish. So, in comparison, a regular performance audit usually takes us between four and six months. So, this is comparatively a much shorter process. The questions that we answer are very limited in scope, very straightforward and narrow, and it's really just meant to give a quick look into something to see if there might be a bigger issue that a legislator might be interested in asking for a full performance audit.

**Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager:** [01:32]

So, to give our listeners some background information on Kansas' foster care system, talk a little bit about the roles that the Department for Children and Families and also those of private organizations play in providing foster care services in Kansas.

**Meghan Flanders, Senior Auditor and Supervisor:** [01:50]

Sure. So, the Department for Children and Families, DCF, contracts with private organizations to provide foster care services in Kansas. And now DCF is currently working with four organizations to provide foster care case management work. Those organizations are KVC Kansas, St. Francis Ministries, Cornerstones of Care, and TFI Family Services. Case management contractors are assigned to children entering the foster care system and those contractors handle their case plan and coordinate the services that those children should be receiving. And then there's also contracts that DCF has with about 30 child placing agencies. Before October 2019, these child placing agencies or subcontractors of the case management contractors, but now they contract directly with DCF. So, the child placing agencies handle things like recruiting foster families, preparing them for licensing and supporting them when they take in foster children amongst a lot of other duties. Child placing agencies are paid for each day that a foster child is placed in one of the homes that they sponsor. So, foster families in Kansas must be licensed and sponsored by a child placing agency. Foster families can choose which agency they want to sponsor them. A child placing agency is also allowed to choose to not sponsor a family. DCF doesn't get involved in those decisions.

**Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager:** [03:27]

So, to answer the audit's objective - of learning stakeholders opinions on whether the Department for Children and Families' processes to ensure foster care services are consistent from one provider to the other, you surveyed foster families. So, talk a little bit about how many foster families were surveyed, your response rate, and what you asked them in the survey.

**Meghan Flanders, Senior Auditor and Supervisor:** [03:52]

So, we surveyed 187 foster families. We asked DCF for information on foster families that had used at least two different child placing agencies in the last two years. We did that because, we, for this survey really just wanted to talk to foster families that had had experiences with at least a couple of child placing agencies so that they could answer questions about the differences between those two child placing agencies. And so DCF identified 187 foster families. We sent a brief online survey to 182 of the families. There were problems with contact information on five of those. We received about 75 responses, which was a response rate of 41%. We are able to report only on the responses that we received. The results cannot be projected. To get their opinion on the consistency of services, we asked them things like how well the different child placing agencies had helped them navigate the foster care system or what the differences were in the quality of interactions with staff at the different child placing agencies.

**Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager:** [05:11]

What did you find after analyzing the survey responses?

**Meghan Flanders, Senior Auditor and Supervisor:** [05:16]

So, we broke the survey up into a couple sections. One was about the inconsistencies in the services, if there were any. Another section was about how easy or difficult they thought it was to transfer between the child placing agencies. So, regarding the inconsistencies between the child placing agencies and whether there were any, we found that most of the foster families responding did report inconsistencies in some of the services provided by the child placing agencies. So, for example, we asked them was there a significant difference in how well the different child placing agencies helped them navigate the foster care system. And 73% said yes, one of the child placing agencies was better, 27% said no they were both similar. The answer that got a more even response about consistency was we asked foster care families if there was a significant difference in the quality of training provided by different child placing agencies. And for that one, 56% of foster families said that yes, one of the child placing agencies was better, and 44% said no they were both similar. So, we also asked them about how easy or difficult it was to transfer child placing agencies. And only 23% of the foster families responding to our survey said the process to transfer was difficult. About 39% said it was neither easy nor difficult and about 39% said the process was easy.

**Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager:** [07:01]

Now, in addition to surveying foster families, you also talked to child placement agency officials. What did they share with you?

**Meghan Flanders, Senior Auditor and Supervisor:** [07:10]

So, we interviewed four child placing agencies, one of which was also a case management contractor. We tried to speak with agencies that we knew had had foster families transferred to or from their agency and then we tried to also cover a larger portion of the state. So, three of the child placing agencies said that there were services that they offer that other child placing agencies might not. Just a side note, because of the limited scope of the audit we're just reporting what the agency was able to tell us in their opinions. We weren't able to do any test work to verify, how this worked out in the world. So, but one agency told us that they are a very large organization and have private donors and they said that that would mean they might be able to offer services or hold events that smaller agencies couldn't. Another agency told us that their particular organization focused on services for children with special needs. So, if foster families are sponsored through them, they might have easier access to the additional training and services offered for children with special needs. Child placing agencies also mentioned, like the foster families, that there could be some difficulty transferring from child placing agency to child placing agency. Three child placing agencies told us a better way to transfer paperwork- clear communication between the child placing agencies or clear guidance from

DCF might help families transfer between the agencies more easily.

**Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager:** [08:58]

So, as we discussed earlier, this is a limited scope audit, but the report did note one potential issue for potential further consideration. Specifically, whether the Department for Children and Families' policies and procedures were effective. Tell us about this issue.

**Meghan Flanders, Senior Auditor and Supervisor:** [09:17]

Because of the limited scope of the audit, we weren't able to test whether DCF policies and procedures were effective. So, I'll go back to the policies and procedures that we did find. We asked DCF what they had in place that would help ensure consistency between child placing agencies and we did find that DCF has policies and procedures to help ensure a minimum standard of service, but child placing agencies can offer more or better services if they choose. So, we looked at the policies, the procedures, the regulations, the contracts, and analyze those, but we weren't able to actually find out if those policies, procedures, contracts, regulations are actually working in practice. So, certain policies and procedures to help ensure consistency in services may be lacking effective enforcement mechanisms. We noted in the report that a previous internal DCF audit of child placing agencies found deficiencies, but no official responses or corrective action plans were filed by the agencies. DCF officials said they're currently working on the audit process and procedures, so we weren't able to test them because of the limited scope. If the internal audits or any of those other processes or procedures were effective in ensuring consistency across child placing agencies.

**Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager:** [10:52]

Finally, what's the main takeaway from this report?

**Meghan Flanders, Senior Auditor and Supervisor:** [10:55]

I would say the main takeaway from the report is that most of the foster families that we surveyed reported inconsistencies in some child placing agency services, but that the process to switch agencies was not difficult.

**Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager:** [11:12]

Meghan Flanders is a Senior Auditor at Legislative Post Audit. She completed a limited-scope performance audit reviewing the consistency across foster care service providers. Meghan, thank you for taking the time to walk me through your findings.

**Meghan Flanders, Senior Auditor and Supervisor:** [11:26]

Thank you.

**Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager:** [11:27]

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