Kansas Child Welfare Contract Change Study: 
The Experience of Frontline Private Agency 
Staff Post-Contract Change

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study was conducted to examine the experience of frontline private agency staff during a child welfare contract change. The study focuses on workers who participated in surveys and/or interviews pre- and post-contract change.

Retention and Intent to Stay

- Twenty-five percent (25%) of survey respondents reported that they no longer work in child welfare.
- Half of the workforce will likely look for a job outside of child welfare next year.
- Frontline workers foresee a short career in child welfare (around 3 years).
- Contract changes impact some workers’ plans to stay in child welfare.

Organizational Climate

- Workers report an increase in job satisfaction following a contract change.
- Organizational commitment significantly decreased after the contract change.
- Contract changes do not appear to impact a worker’s job involvement.
- Stress remains high in post-contract change period for all child welfare workers.
- Workers express disillusionment with agency and state policies and practices that aren’t seen as aligning with their commitment to children and families.

Retention during Contract Changes

Workers identified specific challenges and supports with themes pointing to ways that workers might be retained during a contract change.

Challenges: adjusting to changing agencies and new contracts, changes in pay and benefits, need for better communication and information sharing, transition process disorganization, work demands/distraction and adapting to change in how work is done

Supports: supervisors, co-workers, need for more agency support, and training and transition planning
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This study was conducted to examine the experience of frontline private child welfare agency staff during a contract change. The focus of this report is on research conducted following the contract change. This report accompanies a previous document from this study entitled, *Kansas Child Welfare Contract Change Study: The Experience of Frontline Child Welfare Staff* which focuses on research conducted prior to the contract change. A brief review of the larger study is provided below.

In 2012, the state of Kansas issued a request for proposals (RFPs) for family preservation and foster care/adoption services to begin July 1, 2013. This presented an opportunity to study how frontline child welfare workers experience changes under a performance-based contracting system. In spring 2013, three agencies providing child welfare services under state contracts at the time agreed to participate in the study. At this time, workers knew whether or not their agencies would be gaining or losing contracts and some transition activities had begun.

The study included an online survey of frontline workers administered two to three months before the contract change date. The survey was augmented by focus groups of workers and supervisors also conducted prior to the contract change to obtain additional perspectives on the impact of contract changes on workers. The post-contract change phase of the study reported herein included re-administering the online survey and conducting interviews following the contract changes using the sample study participants in order to compare responses and over time.
METHODOLOGY

Online Survey

The sample of workers for the original survey was selected at random from agency provided lists of frontline workers. Names and email addresses of 314 workers were provided by the participating agencies. The sample size for each agency was determined by setting the parameters as being 95% certain that the mean for any variable was within 5% of the true proportion. Invitations to participate in the study were emailed with three follow-up invitations. There were 175 usable responses (a 56% response rate) for the first administration (pre-contract change) of the survey. Of the 175 respondents from first survey, 145 (83%) provided personal email addresses allowing researchers to follow-up with the post-contract change survey. Invitations to participate in the post-contract change survey were emailed with three follow-up invitations. There were 63 usable responses (a 43% response rate) to the post-contract change survey. The responses on the post contract change survey were matched to workers pre-contract change survey responses. The results that follow compared these workers experiences prior to and after the contract change.

The survey (included in Appendix B) featured questions on workers experience with previous contract changes, their current job, intention to stay in child welfare, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, stress, and job involvement. The questionnaire also included a series of demographic questions and an opportunity to share additional observations.

Focus Groups/Interviews

Ten focus groups were conducted in May 2013. Participants were recruited to obtain variation between offices within an agency (rural and urban) and where possible between job types (case manager, family support worker, etc.). The focus groups included 6 groups of workers (n=29) and 4 groups of supervisors (N=38). Of the 29 workers who participated in focus groups, 27 (93%) provided a personal email address for post-contract change follow-up. This included 9 workers from agencies gaining contracts and 18 from agencies losing contracts. In September and October 2013, all 27 were emailed about scheduling a brief follow-up interview by phone. Two reminders were sent to those that did not respond. One email was returned as
undeliverable. Over half (56%) of those contacted, a total of 15, completed a follow-up interview.

Semi-structured interviews inquired about current employment and the worker’s experience in going through contract changes with a focus on what was helpful during the time. The interview protocol is included in Appendix C. Recordings of each interview were transcribed. This produced 42 pages of transcripts. In addition, responses to the open-ended question on the survey were incorporated with the qualitative data. On the survey, workers were asked if there is anything else they would like to say about the effect of the contract changes. Of the 63 workers who responded to the survey, 46 commented in response to the open-ended question producing an additional 4 pages of transcripts.

We extracted themes from these transcripts. Each of these themes is presented with selected verbatim quotes from the interviews so that the reader can obtain a better sense of what workers experienced as a result of the contract changes.

**STUDY PARTICIPANTS**

**Profile of Post-Contract Change Study Participants**

The majority of post-contract change survey respondents (71%) were experiencing their first contract change. Respondents were primarily (87%) female. The average age was 34, while the median age was 31. The majority of respondents (87%) were Caucasian, 5% were African American, and 2% Native American. Sixty-four percent (64%) have a BSW or MSW degree, 13% have another bachelor’s degree and 10% have less than a bachelor’s degree. The average time working for the current agency was 1.9 years with a median of 1 year. Study participants represented agencies gaining and losing child welfare contracts.

Of 15 interview participants, 6 represented agencies that retained or gained contracts and 9 were from agencies that lost contracts. At the time of the interviews, 5 were at the same agencies where they worked when they participated in the focus groups (though 1 was no longer working in foster care) and 10 were not at the same agencies. Three of the 9 workers (33%) whose agencies lost contracts transitioned to the new contractor though 1 of these workers had already left the new contractor by the time of the interviews.
I. WORKER RETENTION AND TURNOVER DURING CONTRACT CHANGES

1) Turnover/Retention

Survey respondents were asked if their job had been eliminated and if they had changed agencies due to contract changes. Of the workers who responded to both the pre- and post-contract change surveys, forty-eight (48%) percent of workers reported that their jobs were eliminated and 41% reported that they changed agencies. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the respondents to the post-contract change survey reported that they no longer work in child welfare.

Of the 15 workers who participated in the pre-contract change focus groups and post-contract change interviews, 7 reported that they continue to work in child welfare and 8 were no longer in child welfare. When asked if the contract change impacted whether they continued to work in child welfare or not, 6 of the 15 interviewees answered affirmatively.

Table 1 contains a table that summarizes turnover and retention among interviewed workers that includes an overview of the main reasons given for staying or leaving such as the following:

- *I was not informed really what was going on with the other agency and that was part of the reason that I chose not to go to the other agency...I realize they didn’t understand the whole extent of what they were getting with the contract change. If you’re that large of an agency, you need to be prepared and ready. I didn’t feel like it was going to be a good fit for me* – Worker with agency who lost contract

- *I felt overwhelmed and not appreciated* – Worker who left agency that retained/gained contracts

In addition, in the interviews workers discussed continued turnover at the agencies following the contract change.

- *Everything switched over July 1 and I know that there were several people in the office who were immediately looking for new jobs.*

- *Workload has been overwhelming and morale is extremely low. I began looking for new employment about a month after the transition and will be leaving the agency...I can’t wait to get out of the chaos and mess of this agency.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Workers Who Remained in Child Welfare</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gain</td>
<td>stayed</td>
<td>stayed</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Had my agency lost the contract than I would find something else to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Gain</td>
<td>stayed</td>
<td>stayed</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>There were little change in my job due to the contract changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Gain</td>
<td>stayed</td>
<td>stayed</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>I’ve noticed increased busyness but my supervisor is very supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Gain</td>
<td>stayed</td>
<td>stayed</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Change in office morale but my supervisor was a buffer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lost</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>stayed</td>
<td>yes*</td>
<td>*Transitioned to new contractor, felt unsupported and unsure of new agency; left for another child welfare agency (non-contractor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>lost</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>stayed</td>
<td>yes*</td>
<td>Co-workers and supervisor support helped with managing frustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>lost</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>stayed</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>I do it because of kids and families, not a specific company or great pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Workers Who Left Child Welfare</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>gain</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>I just wasn’t happy so I made a conscious decision to look</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>gain</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>yes*</td>
<td>Felt overwhelmed and not appreciated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>lost</td>
<td>stayed*</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>yes*</td>
<td>*Moved to behavioral health within same agency. I don’t think I would have left when I did</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>lost</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>yes*</td>
<td>Contract change caused one more level of disappointment in my job. I don’t want to ever work in child welfare again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>lost</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>yes*</td>
<td>Disorganization with new contractor led to feeling it wasn’t going to be a good fit for me; I would not have left if the contract stayed at the previous agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>lost</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>yes*</td>
<td>Felt unsupported by agency losing contract; lack of information about new contractor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>lost</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Already planned to leave but contract change made me feeling more negative toward my agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>lost</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Already planned to leave for graduate school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2) Intent to Stay

Workers were asked a series of questions about their intentions to stay in child welfare. One question was “How long do you intend to stay in the child welfare field?” The mean response on the first survey was a little more than 3 years with the second survey showing just slightly less than 3 years. Workers did not change their perspective on remaining in the field of child welfare very much. In both cases, workers foresee a relatively short career in child welfare. From a statistical point of view the mean difference was only slightly statistically significantly (Table 2).

Respondents were asked if it was not likely that they would look for a job outside of child welfare in the next year. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of respondents agreed that this was not likely while 50% disagreed. Analysis of these workers pre- and post-contract change responses found a slight increase in their disagreement with this statement with p=.08 (Table 2). There was a statistically significant difference in workers responses to the statement “The changes in the child welfare contracts have caused me to question my choice of child welfare as a career.” On the post-contract change survey, workers were less likely to agree with that statement (p=.04). Forty percent (40%) of workers interviewed agreed that contract changes impacted their plans to continue to work in child welfare. There were no statistical differences in these workers pre- and post-responses on “I seldom think about quitting my job,” or “I will probably look for another position within child welfare in the next year.”
Table 2

*Intent to Stay in Child Welfare*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Pre/post means</th>
<th>T value&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>P value&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How long do you intend to stay in the child welfare field?</td>
<td>Pre 3.02</td>
<td>-1.73</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post 2.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is not likely that I will look for a job outside of child welfare in the next year.</td>
<td>Pre 3.02</td>
<td>-1.73</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post 2.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I seldom think about quitting my job.</td>
<td>Pre 4.27</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post 4.38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The changes in the child welfare contracts have caused me to question my choice of child welfare as a career.</td>
<td>Pre 3.79</td>
<td>-2.16</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post 3.27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will probably look for another position within child welfare in the next year</td>
<td>Pre 4.76</td>
<td>-.33</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post 4.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Themes from the interviews provide more detail on the impact of contract changes on staying in the field of child welfare.

- *I don’t think I would have left...well I think eventually I would have left but I don’t think I would have left when I did.*

- *I don’t know if I could go back to the field now. I would worry about future contract changes.*

- *It was my first contract change. I managed, I survived. I guess in my head I don’t think it probably could ever get worse that what it did this time...I don’t think that I can do it twenty years from now every four years, be wondering about it.*

- *Well, child welfare is a difficult field to be in anyway and to lose the contract like that. Our agency was not very supportive of us. It really kind of underscored the futility of devoting yourself to that particular field of social services.*

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<sup>1</sup> The T value is a statistical measure of the differences between the means.

<sup>2</sup> A p value is the probability that a difference is due to chance. Normally 1% (p=.01) and 5% (p=.05) probabilities are considered significant. A 10% (p=.10) probability is considered marginal.
3) Organizational Climate

The organizational climate variables of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and job involvement were included in the survey to see how they might change prior to and after the contract changes. Table 3 summarizes survey results for all organizational climate variables followed by a discussion of each factor including related themes from the interviews.

Table 3

Organizational Climate Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Pre-Post Means</th>
<th>T value</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>17.76</td>
<td>19.81</td>
<td>T = 2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational commitment</td>
<td>33.16</td>
<td>30.05</td>
<td>T = -2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job involvement</td>
<td>35.28</td>
<td>34.25</td>
<td>T = -.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>25.55</td>
<td>25.35</td>
<td>T = -1.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is an important predictor of turnover.\(^1\) The survey included a five-item satisfaction scale. There was a significant increase in job satisfaction pre- and post-contract change (Table 3). It is likely that since the uncertainty around the contract changes no longer exists that workers are more satisfied with their jobs. While the focus groups did not specifically ask about job satisfaction, there were comments made about morale and burnout that related to satisfaction.

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\(^1\) Ellett, Ellett, & Rugutt, 2003; Jayaratne & Chess, 1984; Landsman, 2001; Mor Barak Levin, Nissly, & Lane, 2006; Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001; Weaver, Chang, Clark & Rhee, 2007.
• I just wasn’t happy and so I made a conscious decision to look while I was still at ___ (current contractor).

• I haven’t noticed a ton of change personally. I’m still in the same position I was in before so not much has changed for me but I have noticed a change in office morale. A lot of people have left. There’s tension, I guess people are just more nervous – Worker with agency that retained/gained contracts

• It was always a stressful job. You know, we always had too much work to do so I don’t know that it really affected my opinion too much. I had already been burnt out before the contract change happened but it definitely did make me feel more negative toward ____ (previous contractor).

b. Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is another organizational climate factor that has been linked to turnover or intention to quit.\footnote{Hwang & Hopkins, 2012; Landsman, 2001; Mor Barak et al., 2006; Mor Barak et al., 2001.} Organizational commitment was measured in the survey by a scale consisting of 7 items that assess the perceived fit between organizational values and those of the worker. There was a significant decrease in organizational commitment pre- and post-contract change with a p value of .009 (Table 3). Interviews revealed mixed perceptions that included strong statements of organizational commitment as well as equally strong sentiments that reflected disillusionment (lack of alignment in values and approach) with the agencies.

• If the change meant that our agency didn’t get the contract then it would have definitely affected me because I would be looking for work elsewhere.

• I’m glad I no longer work at ___, and I would be very hesitant to work there in the future.

• The contract change was very stressful. The organization spent a lot of money on unnecessary things, but wouldn’t provide financial assistance to families.

• I can tell that ____ (new contractor) is very family-friendly oriented but they also, I can tell are just as oriented in taking care of their employees and staff. I don’t know that I felt that way about ______ (previous contractor). In fact, I felt like it was the reverse most of the time because they never wanted to support me as an employee even though they thought I was a good worker most of the time.
• *It is possible that I would go back to ____ because I felt that I belonged there and I did a good job.*

c. **Job involvement**

Job involvement has been identified as an organizational climate variable that can reduce turnover.³ For child welfare workers, personal investment, identification with their job and other connections to the work are called job involvement. There was no difference in job involvement pre- and post-contract change (Table 3). Contract changes did not alter worker’s commitment to their job.

*• I still love working with the children and families in child welfare but for me, it is emotionally exhausting to be driving all day, working late hours and missing out on family things with my own family because of my late hours.*

*• When my job in child welfare closed I felt like my life and career had been destroyed...still do. I had families and children who trusted me...I feel like I abandoned them.*

*• I’m still able to interact with children in need of care which is something that is important to me because I do feel a calling to this area of work...but I just could not do it with the (new) contractor.*

*• I don’t think so because I don’t do it to work for a specific company. I don’t do it for great pay. I do it because of the families and kids. That’s what I love to do. I feel like, in essence, the contract change has been a better thing but it’s just been very frustrating too.*

d. **Stress**

Many research studies demonstrate a relationship between stress and turnover.⁴ In privatized child welfare, contract changes are a difficult and stressful time for the entire system. There were no differences in stress levels comparing pre- and post-contract change with a p value of .28 (Table 3). Stress remains high in the post-contract change period for all child welfare workers.

³ Parker et al., 2003
⁴ Boyas, Wind, & Kang, 2012; Hopkins, Cohen-Callow & Hwang, 2010; Mor Barak et al., 2006; Nissly, Mor Barak, & Levin, 2005.
• It was very chaotic and stressful toward the end. No one knew what was going on and you had people that were not offered positions and the people that were offered positions...I knew months before the contract changed that I wouldn’t be going so I don’t think I was as stressed...I just wanted to finish my commitment to the end of the contract with ___ (previous contractor) and then I knew that I was going to be moving on in a completely different direction.

• That was probably the most stressed out I’ve ever been in my entire life. It was pretty negative experience I would say.

• Having an infant at home and then trying to manage the stress at work that was multiplied by the contract changes, it was just undoable for me. I was very depressed... There were several mornings I cried on my way to work because I just didn’t want to go in... It was just a horrible experience for me. I would never want to do it again.

• It was extremely stressful. I felt very unsupported...it came out later that the contractor holder at the beginning of the year was pretty resentful about losing the contract and did not want to ease the transition to the new contract provider so that’s what upped our stress level initially in the spring when we were feeling unsupported there.

Workers who left the field reported a decrease in stress.

• I did not change over to the new contract agency. It left me feeling depressed, lost and bored. I was used to working in such a fast-paced job that I felt I had nothing important to do. I am finally getting back to “normal” life without all the stress.

4) Commitment to Children and Families

While not specifically measured in the survey, one recurring theme in the pre-contract change focus groups and the post-contract change interviews was commitment to children and families. As seen in the following interview comments, workers are troubled when state policies and practices are perceived as not aligning with their commitment to children and families.

• More importantly than my own financial future is the impact these constant changes have on the children, foster families and birth parents. It has been a disruption on all levels, and the service quality continues to suffer because of it.

• The change was very stressful and I don’t think it benefitted our families at all, only the state of Kansas and their financial goals. I ended up leaving child welfare to take a better paying job, with less stress.
• We don’t have the resources we had before. I can’t even give a kid a toothbrush and toothpaste, we don’t have it.

• I’d been doing that for almost 9 years and so, you know, it was like, I just don’t feel like our state currently is really trying to help the families we are serving. I feel like _____ (agency) was. I really feel like ___ was all about trying to serve our families, trying to get kids home or trying to get permanency for those kids. That was a big push for us. But now I feel like my honest opinion is that it’s all about politics now and saving money in certain areas and not about serving our community and that’s not what I wanted to be a part of.

• Contract changes are not good for workers but most importantly for families… contract change is not good!

• They (DCF) want to micro manage the contracted agency, without the manpower or knowledge of the field to do it effectively.

• It was very disappointing the way the contract change was handled both personally as an employee and professionally how the families and children were treated. Even though there was ample notice that the contract was going to change, there were just so many things like families not having information about the new agency until the week before the date of the actual contract change. Logistical things that could have been so much better handled to ease the transition for the families and employees.

• It I think it just caused one more level of disappointment in my job. I went into the job thinking that the point of child welfare was to help the kids… working there through the transition, it’s pretty clear that it’s not about the kids and what’s best for them. It was really frustrating to me.

II. RETAINING WORKERS DURING A CONTRACT CHANGE

The survey did not specifically address particular challenges or supports during the contract change, however, challenges and supports were a prevalent topic in the responses to the open-ended survey question as well as in the interviews. Themes from these responses point to ways that workers might be retained during a contract change.

1) Challenges

Themes related to challenges included: adjusting to changing agencies and new contracts, changes in pay and benefits, need for better communication and information sharing, transition
process disorganization, distraction and work demands, and adapting to change in how work is done. Each of these themes is illustrated below with worker comments.

a. Adjusting to changing agencies and new contracts

- There was no information shared about why ____ lost the contract so I think there was a lot of confusion about how the new agency would be handling things...I didn’t even know if they would have my department. It wasn’t just a matter of screw the new agency there is no way I’m going.

- It would have been helpful to know more about what is in the contract – what is expected. I don’t know what it says, I’ve never read it. I don’t even know if we can read it. We don’t know what it says yet we’re the ones who are held accountable for doing it.

- I was pretty impressed in how it was handled. It could have been much worse even in my small office and the one I helped to open. I was fortunate...they were all seasoned ____ (previous contractor) workers. They came from a different agency but they knew the child welfare game.

b. Changes in pay and benefits

- A bonus for staying to the end would have been nice.....

- I was offered a job at the new company but for less money. It is hard work and it took me over 5 years to get to where I was. I could not take the pay cut and still work as hard or harder and make less money. The contract changes affected my life in a big way. I am unemployed, looking for work.

- I got a 75 cent raise when I took my position with _______ (new contractor)...so that was really helpful and keeps things in perspective.

- It’s just completely unfair to employees that every 4 years all my benefits, my vacation, my 401K, all of that has to completely start over when I leave my job at one contractor to go to the next...actually an example of how _______ (new contractor) has been staff or employee-friendly to us, is that they gave all of us vacation to use within the first 6 months...they understood that we aren’t necessarily new employees to the system, we’re just new to their company so they respected that and they gave us five days of vacation that we could use automatically within the first 6 months.
c. Need for better communication and information sharing

- They sent us detailed emails often about everything that they knew and they were real honest. I feel like _____ (previous contractor) did everything that they could. Honestly, I don’t think they were getting some of the information that employees transferring over needed.

- I don’t know who to put the blame on – if it was _____ (previous contractor) or _____ (new contractor) or if it was DCF, you know that’s something I’ll never know as a person on the bottom. I had no idea what was going on.

- There was a lot of unpreparedness. A lot of questions but no sources to get those questions answered – questions about cases mostly...also just basic operations questions...We would ask our direct supervisor and they weren’t sure and had to ask up the chain and try to find an answer. A lot of times were just asked to wait. We like to joke about it that the rest of the world was moving at a normal pace but we weren’t. We were several steps behind waiting for the world to catch up with us.

d. Transition process disorganization

- The contract change was the most unorganized scramble I have ever been a part of. We typed out transition summaries for our case logs. We poured our time into making these documents and giving _____ (new contractor) the necessary information from _____ (previous contractor) while neglecting out current work to only find out none of this was needed or used.

- When we get over to _____ (new contractor), we don’t know anything that we’re supposed to be doing...even though there was 6 months to prepare...the biggest problem was that we didn’t have any good supervision or direction during the change...we didn’t have any good formal type of training like welcome to _____ (new contractor), this is how we do things, this is how we work a new referral....

- The new contractor, for instance, had offered to co-hire staff and then have them transition over on July 1 so that we wouldn’t be so short-staffed...but they said nope, we don’t want to work with you. So coming over here, the office wasn’t ready, there was a lot of disorganization, we didn’t have access to files, didn’t have technology...so just very learn as you go but try to serve your families the same way.

- The agency offered to start taking new referrals before the end of the contract in order to ease the transition but the current contractor refused. On the very last work day...I got a new referral. I had to make initial contact on a case that I would not be working, and had to place a child that I would never see again.
• I didn’t get my caseload until the Friday afternoon before we went over on Monday and half my caseload disappeared and went to a different team and I have all these kids that I didn’t know anything about. Nobody staffed them with me. There was nobody that had typed up a summary...I went to court and I didn’t have any information...she (child) had to return to out of home because of the decision that was made in July that I wasn’t prepared to go to court on.

e. Distraction and work demands

The full contract change process starting with bidding preparations and ending with the transition to new contractors and implementation of new contractual requirements involves a great deal of agency time and resources. Given these demands, workers were asked if they found themselves distracted from their casework due to the contract changes. Sixty-two percent (62%) of respondents reported being distracted from casework due to contract changes (a slight increase over 58% distracted pre-contract change). As in the pre-contract change phase of the study, workers discussed continued challenges with managing expectations and workloads.

• Not to be paid extra for working 15 hour days is not right. Driving in the middle of the night for hours at a time after working a full day in the office is not safe.

• I think the main problem was _________ got the contract but they didn’t provide extra people to do the work of the contract, I mean, we were doing a lot of extra things, we had a lot of extra counties involved, we had more things to do and there weren’t people there to help us.

f. Adapting to change in how work is done

• There was much more pressure on getting adoptions done quickly...that was a greater emphasis on getting those done timely and more emphasis on getting things done right. There were more people written up in the last month for not doing their job properly or up to DCF’s specifications than I was aware of in the whole last year and a half.

• With the contract change, we had new things, different rules we had to follow...policies that changed with the contract and it’s just really difficult to keep up with. Okay what form are we supposed to be using because it just changed two months ago so I don’t know. Just things like keeping up with constantly changing policies, roles, rules and forms and everything else that they expect.
2) **Supports**

Themes related to supports included: supervisors, co-workers, need for more agency support, and training and transition planning. Each of these themes is illustrated below with worker comments.

a. **Supervisors**

- *The administrators and CEO they all came down and talked to us a little bit about what was going to happened and to try to console us a little bit but my supervisor was really the one that did a lot of the day to day...my supervisor stepped in when she could and when she needed to if I was completely drowning and didn’t have time to do whatever. She really helped me to do the simple stuff – do you need me to cover this visit, do you need me to go talk to this parent so you can get your paperwork done? I’ll do that.*

- *I feel like my supervisor, he’s very supportive. He has been a buffer for me.*

- *My supervisor and the other one on the floor, they had been through contract changes before...so they kind of had an idea of what it was going to be like.*

- *My supervisor is open and I can be honest with him. He has an open door policy so I can ask questions. I feel like he values my personal feelings. He encourages me to take care of myself...I understand that it’s a huge agency and they’re not going to be perfect but with my supervisor I know they have my back.*

- *My supervisor, if she had been more willing to get in and help us with our caseloads that would have been helpful.*

b. **Co-workers**

- *I have amazing co-workers and an amazing, yet frustrated as we are, boss.*

- *It was more like getting support from co-workers. Realizing that we were all in the same boat and it wasn’t just me feeling the frustrations. That made it a whole lot better.*

- *The greatest aspect of the change is that the team I worked with at the previous agency transferred over mostly intact. I am still working with the same people (co-workers) as I did at the previous agency. If this were not the case, I most likely would not have stayed at the new agency.*

c. **Need for more agency support**

- *Just on a daily basis being supportive of your efforts and telling each other hang in there and let’s keep going. The agency did dangle the thought of a bonus incentive if you*
stayed until the end. I don’t know if it was helpful or not because, of course, they didn’t
go through with it.

- I think definitely if they had been able to keep more staff on through the end of the
contract change that would have been helpful. If people weren’t taking so much
vacation time, that would have been more helpful.

- The agency had 2 or 3 meetings on services like unemployment…but they didn’t follow
through with the things they said they were going to do.

- I can’t really identify something that ‘oh this is really helpful what they did’. I mean the
first week that we were over there I saw a lot of commitment from people like the upper
levels of the agency, like I saw vice-presidents unpacking boxes and moving things
around. But after that first week, everyone disappeared and I didn’t really feel supported
at all actually.

- I think it would have been helpful if the administrators would have stepped in a little bit
more and also provided that support, you know not just emails…come down and ask
what you can do. At times, you were so busy you didn’t even have time for lunch. Well
here, let me get you lunch, or do you need anything else? That could have been better.

- We do unit meetings with everyone in the office each week. Usually someone will bring
breakfast…our director is there which I think is really good. I don’t remember ever
meeting with the director at _____ (previous contractor) maybe once a year…they want
to know what issues we are having personally within the office as well as professionally.
We can all sit around a roundtable and discuss what the concerns or complaints are and
solutions…it seems like the director is really hands on with being approachable.
At_______ (previous contractor), there was such a hierarchy or don’t go to the director
first…which just makes it seem like they’re unapproachable. You know that they’re so
much better than you as a staff, as a family support worker…here they just have a good
sensible, common-sense approach to working and taking care of families.

**d. Training and transition planning**

- They should have hired staff before July to go over and start getting things prepared and
informing people on who their caseloads would be, when court reports were due and
getting summaries together but the previous contractor didn’t want to help out.

- More training and transition-preparedness prior to the transition that would have helped
a little bit. It just seemed like July 1 everything started. So we were in the process of
training for the agency expectations, to meet their expectations and expected to
continue working the cases. It just felt a little overwhelming.
• Hiring of additional transportation staff. You know before they had to cover such a large area.

• There was a big learning curve for using their technology so I think that making that available for training prior to the transition would have been helpful.

• The state needs to have a liaison between the agencies to make them work together. I think there are things that ______ (previous contractor) tried to do and things that ______ (current contractor) tried to do but they didn’t happen. I mean you just hear all kinds of rumors but they said that ______ tried to subcontract with ______ to take all the new referrals in the last month but ______ wouldn’t do it. I guess there were hard feelings. Then we heard that they tried to do something with on-call but that didn’t work out. The state just needs someone to come in and say ‘this is how it’s going to work’ not be like ‘oh, you got the contract now go figure it out’ because the agencies don’t seem to be able to do that for themselves.

CONCLUSION

Contract changes have an impact on the frontline child welfare staff in private agencies. At a minimum, contract changes distract the majority of frontline workers. More concerning, however, is the impact of contract changes on turnover and intention to stay in child welfare. In this study, twenty-five percent (25%) of respondents to a post-contract change survey reported that they no longer work in child welfare. While the study sample represented just a small number of staff, it included those in agencies losing and gaining contracts, and does raise concern. Since re-bidding occurs every few years, there is a continued cost to the system in losing a significant part of its experienced workforce each time contracts change. More positively, however, specific challenges and supports identified by workers point to strategies that might be employed in order to retain workers during a contract change.
Appendix A: References


Appendix B: Survey Questionnaire

Kansas Child Welfare Contract Change Study

Welcome

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by the Kansas Workforce Initiative with the University of Kansas, School of Social Welfare. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You should read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

The School of Social Welfare at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. We are conducting this study to better understand how child welfare workers experience changes in Kansas child welfare contracts. This will entail your completion of a questionnaire.

The questionnaire is expected to take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The content of the questionnaires should cause no more discomfort than you would experience in your everyday life. Although participation may not benefit you directly, we believe that the information obtained from this study will help us gain a better understanding of your work experiences. Your participation is solicited, although strictly voluntary. Your choice to participate or not participate will not affect your employment. Every effort will be made by researchers to preserve your confidentiality. Your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings.

If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, please feel free to contact us by phone or mail. Completion of the survey indicates your willingness to participate in this project and that you are at least age 18.

If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research participant, contact

Human Subjects Committee  Michelle Levy  Lawrence Campus (HSCL)  Principal Investigator  University of Kansas  KU School of Social Welfare 2385 Irving Hill Road 210 Watkins Home Lawrence, Kansas 66045 Lawrence, KS 66045 (785) 864-7429 (785)864-2291 HSCL@ku.edu mlevy@ku.edu
We are interested in your job experiences as the Kansas Child Welfare system goes through contract changes. This is a pre-change survey. We will follow-up with you again in early September. This survey contains several short scales. It is important that you answer each item so that we obtain an accurate picture of your experiences.

Please enter your survey number below. You have been given a number so that we can keep track of responses. Your number will not be disclosed or associated with your name in this survey.

How many child welfare contract changes have you gone through?
My position will be (has been) eliminated due to the contract changes.
I will / did change agencies due to contract changes.
Do you find yourself distracted from your casework due to the contract changes?

Please indicate your intentions to stay in child welfare

How long do you intend to stay in the field of child welfare?

I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization.
I talk up this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for
If the values of this organization were different, I would not be as attached to the organization
My attachment to this organization is primarily based on the similarity of my values and those represented by the organization
Since joining this organization, my personal values and those of the organization have become more similar
What this organization stands for is important to me
I feel a sense of "ownership" for this organization rather than just being an employee

Please respond to each of the following items regarding your satisfaction with your job.

I feel fairly well satisfied with my present job.
Most days I am enthusiastic about my job.
Each day of work seems like it will never end.
I find real enjoyment in my work.
I consider my job rather unpleasant.
How often did you have any of the following experiences during the last month?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once in a Great While</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Always</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling depressed</td>
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<td>Being emotionally exhausted</td>
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<td>Feeling &quot;burned out&quot;</td>
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<td>Feeling rundown</td>
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<td>Being &quot;wiped out&quot;</td>
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<td>Being physically exhausted</td>
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</tbody>
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Please respond to each item regarding your feelings about your job.

The most important things that happen to me involve my present job.

To me, my job is only a small part of who I am.

I am very much involved personally in my job.

I live, eat and breathe my job.

Most of my interests are centered in my job.

I have very strong ties with my present job which would be very difficult to break.

Usually I feel detached from my job.

Most of my personal life goals are job-related.

I consider my job to be very central to my existence.

I like to be absorbed in my job most of the time.

What is your primary job responsibility?

- Working with birth parents
- Working with children
- Working with foster parents
- Other (specify) ___________

What is your highest degree?

- Less than Bachelors
- Bachelors in Social Work degree
- Other Bachelors degree
- Masters in Social Work degree
- Other masters degree
- Doctoral degree
- Other (specify) ___________

How many years have you worked in child welfare (child protection, family preservation, foster care and adoption)?

- Less than 1 year
- 1 to 3 years
- 3 to 5 years
- 5 to 10 years
- more than 10 years

How long have you worked for this agency (in years) ______________

What is your current job title? ________________________________

We will contact you again in a few months. Please provide a non-work email address so that we can follow-up after July 1. ____________________________ If you do not have a non-work email, you can get one at http://new.mail.yahoo.com_addresses

If there is anything else you would like to tell us about your work experiences with the contract changes, please use this space:

What is your age?

What is your gender? Female Male

Please select the category that matches your racial/ethnic identity:

- African American-Non-Hispanic
- American-Indian
- Asian
- Hispanic
- White / Non-Hispanic
- Other (specify)
Appendix C: Contract Change Interview Questions

Post - Contract Change Follow-up Interviews

QUESTIONs

Are you working at the same agency where you were prior to the contract change (or at the time you participated in the focus group for this study)?

If yes, are you in the same position you were in prior to the contract change?

If no, are you still working in child welfare?

Looking back over the past few months, tell us about your experience in going through the contract changes.

Follow-up questions:
• How have the changes in child welfare contracts affected you at work?
• How has the change affected how you feel about what you do?
• Has the contract change made an impact on your plans to continue to work in child welfare?

What has helped you during this time?

Follow-up questions:
• What has your agency done to help during this time?
• What has your supervisor done that has been helpful?
• Who or what else has helped?
• What would be helpful?