

# A Day in the Life of a Child Welfare Specialist



Oklahoma Department of Human Services

**T**he mission of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services is to help individuals and families in need help themselves lead safer, healthier, more independent and productive lives.

OKDHS hires hundreds of child welfare specialists to implement the Child Welfare Services program each year. These compassionate, self motivated professionals help fulfill the mission of Oklahoma's largest state agency.



## What Does a Child Welfare Specialist Do?

### Child Protective Services

Child welfare specialists receive allegations of child abuse and neglect from the statewide child abuse and neglect hotline. CPS workers then identify and assess the allegations and ensure that reasonable efforts are made to maintain and protect children in their own homes as long as their safety is not at risk. The day-to-day activities include managing a caseload of children and families, gathering information, and completing assessments and investigations. Investigations include interviewing children and families, assessing home conditions and recommending appropriate interventions. Child welfare specialists also complete reports for the district attorney and attend court hearings, as well as testify in court cases. In addition, child welfare specialists make referrals to community providers and help locate community services for children and families in need.

### Permanency Planning

Permanency Planning child welfare specialists provide services to children who are in the legal custody of OKDHS. Permanency Planning workers assist the child's family in correcting the conditions that led to the child's removal from their home. Child welfare specialists work with families to develop and implement treatment plans, complete court reports, attend court hearings and testify in court cases. They also make referrals for needed services, transport children to appointments, provide support to help ensure a family's success, visit children in their foster care homes monthly, and continually assess the child's safety.

## Foster Care

Foster Care child welfare specialists work with families to provide safe, caring homes for children in OKDHS custody. Foster Care workers interview and assess families who are applying to provide placement for children in out-of-home care to ensure they have the ability to meet a child's or children's needs. The assessment includes gathering information on the family's background, history, financial situation, relationship status, demographics and familial relationships, as well as determining if the home has enough space and is safe for the child. Foster Care workers also provide support for the foster family and continually assess the child's safety.

## Adoption Services

Adoption Services child welfare specialists provide services to children in OKDHS custody when reunification efforts with the parents or legal guardian have failed or are not in the best interest of the child. Adoption CW specialists provide consultation on the adoption process to Permanency Planning specialists for children whose permanency plan is adoption, make referrals for adoptive resource family assessments and child profiles, a document that provides the child's history for families who are interested in adoption. Adoption specialists identify adoptive homes for children, assist adoptive families with incorporating the child into their adoptive home, help establish medical services, counseling and child care, if eligible, and support the child and family in their transition. In addition, Adoption specialists conduct annual reassessments on adoptive families to continually assess the safety of the home for OKDHS' children who are available for adoption.

## **What child welfare specialists say about their work days:**

**“I average being in court two to three days a week.” J.D., child welfare specialist, Oklahoma County, bachelor’s degree, management.**

**“Each day brings a different crisis or situation. Time management and thinking on your feet are crucial in this job.” M.T., child welfare specialist, Craig County, bachelor’s degree, business administration.**

**“It’s great to work with a family and have them really appreciate the help that you are giving them. If you feel that you are going to save the world in this job, though, Child Welfare is probably not for you.” S.S., child welfare specialist, Oklahoma County, master’s degree, social work.**

**“With Child Welfare you have the opportunity to touch a life and shape a future, even if you never see it. So even with the pager going off at 2 a.m. or on Christmas Day, it is all worth it in the life of a child.” K.M., child welfare specialist, Haskell County, bachelor’s degree, social work.**

**“Child Welfare is fast paced and exciting. No two days are alike, and rarely are two problems similar. The families we work with expect high levels of dedication because we are dealing with their children and their lives. The appeal of this job is that you are asked to do something very difficult and then are given a great deal of autonomy.” J.H., child welfare specialist, Oklahoma County, bachelor’s degree, education.**

## **What OKDHS child welfare specialists need to know**

OKDHS child welfare specialists serve children and families with severe problems – poverty, unemployment, substance abuse, domestic violence, illness – and multiple needs. Child welfare specialists deal with complex, painful and often life-threatening situations that require sound judgment and timely decisions.

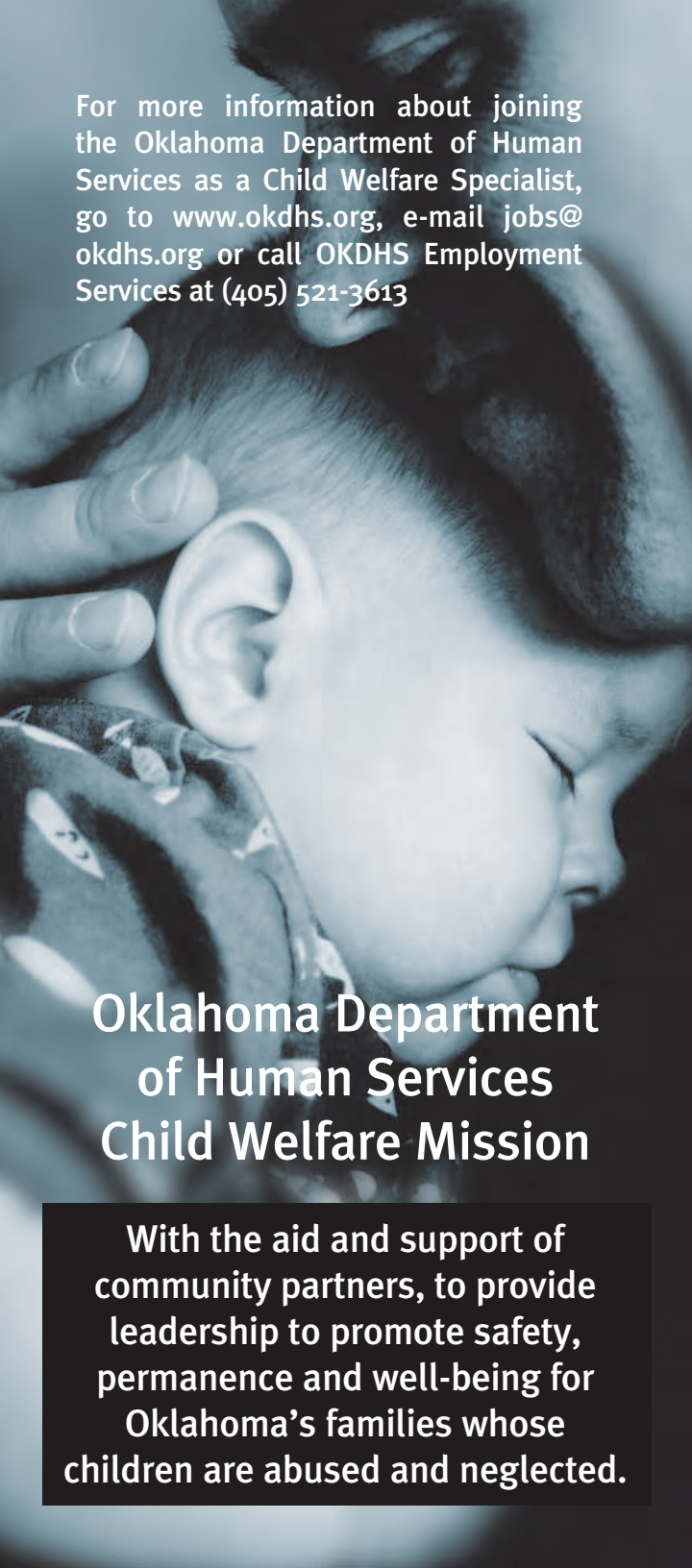
## **What makes a child welfare specialist successful**

“Good time management skills are a must, as are workers who are self motivated. Workers need to have good communication skills and be able to communicate effectively both verbally and in written form. Organization is important, but so is flexibility. This job is emotionally taxing. Workers must have outside interests and personal care habits.” D.K., child welfare supervisor, Oklahoma County.

“Confidence is crucial.” J.K., child welfare supervisor, Payne County.

## **Skills needed also include:**

- Bachelor’s degree
- Positive attitude
- Good analytical skills
- Compassion
- Professionalism
- Ability to work cooperatively with parents, court system, foster parents, law enforcement and the community
- Honesty
- Basic computer skills



For more information about joining the Oklahoma Department of Human Services as a Child Welfare Specialist, go to [www.okdhs.org](http://www.okdhs.org), e-mail [jobs@okdhs.org](mailto:jobs@okdhs.org) or call OKDHS Employment Services at (405) 521-3613

## Oklahoma Department of Human Services Child Welfare Mission

With the aid and support of community partners, to provide leadership to promote safety, permanence and well-being for Oklahoma's families whose children are abused and neglected.



## **Is OKDHS Child Welfare Services for you?**

The Oklahoma Department of Human Services Child Welfare Services program offers a unique opportunity to those desiring a challenging, important career. Child welfare specialists receive extensive training, as well as supervision by qualified Child Welfare supervisors.

Child welfare specialists work in each county statewide. Metro areas have multiple offices and child welfare specialists specialize in providing services. Rural counties may have fewer staff allowing child welfare specialists to become comprehensive workers, dealing with investigations and permanency planning issues.

## **The advantages of working for a state agency**

“Supervisors are extremely helpful and knowledgeable and treat their employees with a great deal of respect, which is something I have not necessarily encountered in the private sector. I have also never had a job that is so family friendly.” C.H., child welfare specialist, Oklahoma County, bachelor’s degree, psychology.

“OKDHS provides workers with an insurance allowance that pays for my entire family to have excellent medical coverage, dental and vision benefits and the time off to use these services.” M.T.

OKDHS Pub. No. 07-02      Revised 3/2013

This publication is authorized by Oklahoma Department of Human Services Director Ed Lake and printed by OKDHS in accordance with state and federal regulations at a cost of \$128.80 for 644 copies. Copies have been deposited with the Publications Clearinghouse of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. OKDHS offices may request copies on ADM-9 (23AM009E) electronic supply orders. Members of the public may obtain copies by calling 1-877-283-4113 (toll free), by faxing an order to (405) 962-1741, or by downloading a copy at [www.okdhs.org/library](http://www.okdhs.org/library).