

Canyon County Department of Child Welfare offers a wide range of services to help children in their everyday lives so they can grow up to be happy and productive members of our communities.

### **Mission Statement**

The mission of Child Welfare Services (CWS) is to consistently, compassionately, and creatively prevent child abuse and neglect and to protect children by empowering families to achieve their highest potential. We will collaborate with community partners, families, and each other to inspire and facilitate social change.

### **Service Description**

Canyon County CWS is dedicated to protecting children from abuse and neglect. CWS works with families to ensure the safety of their children and to help them reach their full potential. If children cannot be safely cared for in their homes, CWS strives to place them with families that can make a lifelong commitment to them. CWS collaborates with the community toward safe, healthy, happy children and strong families.

Child Welfare Services basic functions include investigating reports of abuse and neglect of children; providing services to children and families to support children staying safely in their own homes; if necessary, placing children in relative care or foster care best suited to their needs; providing services to help youth in foster care make the transition to adulthood; and placing children in adoptive homes.

Canyon County Child Welfare Services is dedicated to working with our community partners to provide and support prevention and early intervention services in our neighborhoods and in our schools.

### **Philosophy and Purpose**

Canyon County Child Welfare Services primary purpose is to respond to the needs of at-risk children to ensure their physical and emotional safety and well-being. There are seven philosophical tenants that outline the purpose of CCDCW and become guiding principles in caseworkers' duties:

1. The best place for children to grow up is in and with a safe and permanent family.
2. Most parents want to be good parents, and when adequately supported, they have the strength and capacity to care for their children and keep them safe.
3. Families who need assistance from CCDCW are diverse in terms of structure, culture, race, religion, economic status, beliefs, values, and lifestyles.
4. CCDCW agencies are held accountable for achieving outcomes of child safety, permanence, and family well-being.
5. CCDCW's efforts are most likely to succeed when clients are involved and actively participate in the process.

6. When parents do not fulfill their responsibilities to protect their children, CCDCW has the right and obligation to intervene.
7. When children are placed in out-of-home care because their safety cannot be assured, CCDCW should develop a permanency plan as soon as possible.

### Vignette 1: Canyon County Department of Child Welfare

Canyon City is the seat of Canyon County. The Canyon County Department of Child Welfare (CCDCW) had long considered itself a unique and innovative organization. Created in the early 1960s, its initial years of development came during a time when national attention was focused on the creation of high-quality human service programs designed to address both client needs and community problems. The department's director was hired after an extensive national search. She built a strong reputation as a person who ran successful programs and was well liked by the community, her staff, and clients.

**Creating a Dynamic Organization.** The director took the job at CCDCW because she was excited by the challenge of building a department from scratch with resources made available from federal, state, and county governments. She hired staff members who, like herself, were committed to teamwork, collaboration, and problem solving. Middle managers and supervisors were professionals with many years of experience, most of whom had master's of social work (MSW) degrees, and many line workers were recent graduates of MSW programs. In selecting among job applicants, the director stressed high energy, enthusiasm, collective effort, mutual support, esprit de corps, and competence.

From the 1960s through most of the 1990s, CCDCW built a reputation for high-quality services, a high rate of success, and a positive work environment. It was an organization other counties looked to for leadership in dealing with prominent problems of the time—not only child abuse and neglect but also domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and other family-related problems.



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Netting, F.E., Kettner, P.M., McMurtrey, S.L., & Thomas, L.M. (2017).  
Social Work ~~Practice~~ Macro Practice, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Upper  
Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

**Dismantling a Dynamic Organization.** Toward the end of the 1990s, two things happened that changed the direction of the department. First, as a county in a state with one of the fastest growing populations in the country, Canyon County doubled its population between 1985 and 2000. Increasing fiscal and political conservatism influenced decisions of the county board of supervisors, and the child welfare budget became the focus of a major budget reduction effort. Second, the original director reached retirement age.

The board of supervisors used this opportunity to appoint a person who had spent his career in the insurance industry. They saw this as an opportunity to introduce "hard-nosed business practices" into the running of human service programs. At the same time, state and federal regulations governing child welfare services became increasingly more extensive and strict. Because of CCDCW's strong reputation, employment there served as a solid reference and helped make staff members more marketable in other counties and states. Many managers and supervisors took advantage of this to accept other employment offers, and some of their positions were filled by individuals who had political connections to the board or to the director. The team approach that had dominated for two decades was replaced by a more rigid bureaucratic structure, and collegial practices were replaced by strictly enforced administrative policies.

Within about five years, CCDCW bore little resemblance to its original form. The most noticeable change was in its structure. Its organizational chart reflected clearly defined work units, with reporting lines from entry level all the way to the director. Standardized workloads were assigned regardless of the difficulty or complexity of cases, and standardized performance criteria were used to judge success. Individual discretion in decision making was curtailed, and employee-oriented efforts such as job rotation, job sharing, and flex-time were eliminated.

**Involvement of the County Board.** Members of the county board of supervisors began to receive complaints about CCDCW. Although most child maltreatment reports were investigated, many children for whom an initial report was judged invalid were later re-reported as victims of recurring abuse or neglect. Also, annual reports revealed a steady decline in the successful resolution of problems for families served by the department. Eventually, a consultant was hired to do an organizational assessment and to make recommendations to the board of supervisors.

The consultant found that staff expressed low levels of commitment to the organization and its objectives. Line-level workers felt their opinions did not matter, so most either kept comments to themselves or complained to colleagues. When problems were identified, few visible efforts were made to analyze them or to propose solutions. Most staff members believed that success was defined in terms of adherence to policies and procedures rather than achievement of appropriate case outcomes. Ambitious staff members who sought upward mobility in the department became experts on internal policies, not on family problems or service provision.

Among those in management positions, the consultant found that most emphasized control. Virtually all decisions about cases had to pass through and be signed by a supervisor and administrator. Managers felt that staff ignored their efforts to adhere to policies and procedures, especially when it came to keeping paperwork up to date. Compliance with rules and completion of required reports and forms were the main criteria by which staff members' performance was judged. Also, although managers expressed a desire to achieve successful client outcomes, such criteria were not part of the internal system by which managers and caseworkers were evaluated.

### Ethical and Professional Behavior



**Behavior:** Use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior.

**Critical Thinking Question:** What effects do you think rigid bureaucracy and limited autonomy have on supervision, consultation, and professional judgment and behavior?