

# Parent Advocate Program



Since it began in early 2020, the Family First Prevention program in Kansas recognized the need for more intensive attention on prevention of placing children in foster care – specifically, keeping families together before a petition is filed to remove a child from the family. This puts a focus on family well-being, to give parents and caregivers support and access to needed resources to prevent or relieve a crisis in the family before it escalates.

The goal of helping families in distress before a crisis occurs is to prevent the unnecessary and traumatic separation of children from their families. Providing advocacy and legal assistance when needed is one way to make sure families have the support and resources they need to keep their children safely with them. The

Parent Advocacy Program is an important part of this effort.

The Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) contracts with KLS to provide case management and legal services to families in 10 counties. The mission of the Parent Advocate Program is to keep families together and prevent children from going into the foster care system. We do this through education, advocacy (personal and legal) and collaboration. To receive services, a family must be involved in a report to DCF, and DCF must make the referral of the family to the Parent Advocate Program.

**Together, the parent or caregiver and Parent Advocate explore family issues that can be resolved, or that could have legal solutions. Involving a KLS attorney when appropriate, legal action moves the family toward stability for the child.**

Some Parent Advocates have lived experience either as an informal foster parent (raising a relative's child) or as a parent or family member of a foster child. They work intensively with families and with KLS Parent Advocate Attorneys, if legal assistance is needed for the family.

Working with parents and caregivers, Parent Advocates provide resources, support, and guidance to strengthen families.

Goals of the Parent Advocate Program are to:

- Provide high quality services to promote family well-being
- Help parents work through difficulties
- Help parents feel stronger and more confident
- Make needed services and resources more available

Questions? For more information, you can email Lead Parent Advocate, Shila Estes, [estess@klsinc.org](mailto:estess@klsinc.org).



Last updated on July 30, 2024.

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