

Ruby and Ch. 9

Ch. 9: Let's start by talking kind of broadly, how has the outlook when it comes to child welfare changed over the years?

Ruby: Like I said I have been in child welfare for 20 years and the original focus was similar to a law enforcement focus where the caseworker would go to the family home, want to separate everybody, go to the school, go to the school and let parents you had seen their child, very evidence driven in trying to figure out what had happened and what should happen. And I think there was also the mentality that the apple didn't fall far from the tree, so using family members as a support network or as an option for placement really wasn't considered because there was concern around, if Mom's behaving this way, her parents must be the same way and so that's not a safe place for the child. So the option really was foster care and to remove kids and place them in foster care and try to work with the family that way. I think what we realized over the years is that public and human services agencies don't really make very good parents either and that we have done some disservice to children by trying to raise them in our system and so keeping that in mind as well as balancing child safety and making sure that children are safe as best we can we try to figure out how can we engage the family, we're recognizing the strength of the family is that they know their family best, far better than a stranger knocking on their door is ever going to. And so having a more friendly approach, saying help us to understand your family, help us to understand what's going on, what your strengths are, what your stressors are, how we might engage with you around your stressors to help reduce those or teach you skills that you were never taught, that's where our focus has shifted. As well as looking at, kids to far better, the outcomes for children are far better when they can stay within their family unit, so that might not mean that they can stay with mom and dad but could they stay with aunt and uncle or could they stay with grandma, or could they stay with the lady down the street who they have always referred to as aunt but they are really not. Kids just do better when they can stay within their environment that they are familiar with.

Ch. 9: I think we've grown to understand some of the reasons behind that but I wonder if our viewers who are watching say, but if the mom is hurting this kid how is sending this kid to grandma going to be any different? That speaks to kind of what you said, or even just not being so quick to take a child out of a home. The viewers might wonder, if there's an allegation of abuse that's happening you need to take that kid out of the home. Has research shown that that's sometime different?

Ruby: Absolutely I think we are a system where people always look at we did too much or we did too little. So it's a really fine balance there between what is the right thing to do to ensure this child's safety and their well-being at the same time. We have to consider both. So we have to look at what was the incident that happened, we have to grade that so to speak on a scale of minor to severe. And I think that that's difficult often times for the public to understand because isn't all child abuse awful and bad? Yes it is but it's also on a continuum and we can't treat all of it the same way. So we have to look at what was the incident that occurred, what are the support networks that this family has naturally, could we build some of those in, could we use some of those to try to prevent anything like this from happening

again. And if the incident that occurred is severe then looking at those safety supports to say, could the child go there would that be a safe place or the child? Or could the person who did this be removed from the home instead of automatically removing the child from the home, so that the child could stay in their same bed, can stay in their same house, can go to their same school and have as little disruption as possible while the issues get worked on. So we have to look at it on the whole continuum and think about what's in the best interest of the child's well-being as well as creating safety for the child.

Ch. 9: What is it like when a child is removed, you have been to these situations before, so understanding that this may be very traumatic for the child, maybe kind of help us to understand that.

R. I was a trainer as well as part of my career in child welfare so I always try to walk a new trainer or a new caseworker into imagining what that might be like. Even as an adult, so if you took as an adult, someone that you don't know, shows up at your house or at your place of work, asks you a bunch of really hard personal questions about your family, and then tells you, you know you have about ten or 15 minutes to gather up some clothes for a week, if you want to bring a pillow or something like that you can, but you need to leave your family behind, you need to leave any of your pets behind, can't really give you any time to make a phone call to tell these people goodbye, because we really need to go. And I take you from your environment that you are used to every day and I take you to a different environment that in some cases is very different from what you are used to, and then I say, ok I'll be back in touch with you but I'm not sure when that's going to be, it might be a couple of days it might be a week before I see you or talk to you again. Or in some instances it might not be me who talks to you again, it might be a different case worker cause I'm going to hand your case off to someone else. And then I go away. And so if your seven experiencing that, or four experiencing that, that's very scary, that's very traumatic to not sleep in your bed at night, not being able to have mom tuck you in or say goodnight to you or just know she's in the other room. That's a very traumatic experience and so one night foster care workers need to carefully consider is that the best and only option to ensure this child's safety. Because that experience alone will be traumatic for them.

Ch. 9: If the child is being abuse, whether is verbal abuse or the child just doesn't always have enough food, do they want to leave mom and dad? Do they want to find a place where they can get full every night?

R: In the 20 years I have done this I can't say that I've ever seen a child who wanted to leave. I've even had cases where kids had broken arms and want to know when can they go back home, when can I come home. They don't want to go. So no, I think is it yeah is it uncomfortable to go to bed hungry sometimes, when you get to school you get to see your friends who have good clothes or clothes that fit and you're being teased because yours aren't. Is that hard, absolutely that's hard. But the bottom line is would you choose that over not being able to be with mom and dad?

Ch. 9: So you've never seen a child who wanted to leave their home even if they were the victim of abuse.

R. I haven't. I've seen them want that situation to change and be different, they want the abuse to stop, but they still don't want to leave the home.

Ch. 9: Is there anything to say, even if they don't want to be removed that they are better off being removed?

R. That's ones hard. When it comes to them being unsafe, yes, it is better off for them to be removed. God forbid any child would be killed as a result of abuse or an event. That's what we want to prevent. So for safety reasons we have to make the decision that it is best for them to be removed. With that goal always being to try to get them back safely. So that they can get back to their mom and dad when the circumstances have changed.

Ch. 9: Can you us a brief example of a situation of in the past where you might have put that child in foster care but now you would work with the family to keep that child in the home.

R Sure I think that could be a number of situations. So before where we would see what the issues were, see what the things that were causing this child to be unsafe, the immediate response was to remove this child to foster care and then begin asking the questions are there relatives, are there family members, are there strong close family folks that could take the child. After we've already removed the child. So there's back to we've already had the one night in foster care. Now we're asking those questions before we even meet the child. Who can we contact, who can we ask? So we're making those phone calls before we even leave the house to grandma, to say, grandma can you care for this child, can we come see your home to ensure that this is a safe place to bring the child. And we're doing that right up front so that when we do leave the home, we go to grandma's house.

Ch. 9: Are there studies that show that kids are better off living with relatives that know all about their case?

R Absolutely, and we see that even kids whose parental rights have been terminated have found that they are in their late teens and maybe grow up in our system, never being adopted, when those cases end, there's plenty of research out there that supports that those kids go find their parent again and go back to the same scene we removed them from. And so the shift now is to really look at that and consider what's changed in that family and in that kid since that child was removed? So one they've gotten older, two they gotten some therapy to help them to understand the issues that their parents were facing when they were abusing them, maybe the parents have changed, maybe they've grown up maybe they've gotten services and help to change whatever that issue was that causing their children to be unsafe. And so looking at how can we inform both sides, the now adult child and the parents what the issues were how to deal with them, how to not be taking advantage and hurt again and reconnecting .

Ch. 9: What's it like for children who are removed out of their parents home and they age out of the system without ever being adopted is life tough for them when they are no longer supported by the state?

R Unfortunately there are many statistics that say that those children end up homeless. Those children end up in the Department of Correction System, they end up single and pregnant parents. So yes I would say that life is very hard for them. Again go back to think about your experiences when you were 18, 19,

20 when you were trying to figure out if you even had the wherewith all to make it on your own and how many times you turned back to family. It might not have been your Mom and Dad but a family member to say hey I'm so excited I just got my first job. Or hey, I'm really bummed out because my boyfriend or girlfriend just broke up with me. Or who am I going to have thanksgiving dinner and be included. And you don't have that you don't have any of those people who are family to share the experience with.

Ch. 9: Let's talk a little bit about training social workers receive and the continuum training that they get. I know you said you are going to look up the specifics we won't talk about that but it's changed, it's used to be just one week and that's changed, talk to me about why and what's the continuum training.

R 20 years ago it was one week of training when you hired a new case worker in Colorado. With the assumption that these people all have bachelors degrees in a related type field and this one week of training on top and I think there's been enough conversation, research, understanding that this is a very difficult field, nothing in it is black and white it's all varying shades of grey making decisions about peoples lives and one week probably just wasn't satisfying everything a caseworker needed to know to go out and do the job. So our training academy has changed, it's now six weeks of training where they go and participate in classroom exercises do various training, they come back on the job and have set things they need to learn on the job that are true to the county they were hired with. And then that goes back and forth for six weeks of training. They've been required to once they're certified to maintain forty hours a year of ongoing training, so training really never stops, you have an obligation to annually receive 40 hours of continuous training.

Ch. 9: How much time do these case workers really spend with families?

R. The majority of their job is spent with families. So if you took a forty hour work week I would guess that they are spending an average of 25 to 30 hours in families homes or meeting with families in the office or in various locations another significant portion of their job is court and another significant portion is job is paperwork.

Ch. 9: When they do go to a family I think of the first day is a casework who is the intake caseworker, she went to check to see if a father was drinking and if the home was still safe. I guess I was surprised that she spent more than an hour in there with her. Can you talk about that amount of time. Are there situations where walk and only spend ten minutes.

R. Of course there are and again it depends upon the family. Most families I would say are open to allowing the caseworker to come in, hearing what the allegations are that were reported about them and then share with the caseworker from their perspective what is going on, what are the struggles in the family what are the things that are going well with the family. Show the caseworker around the family home, so I would say on average a first time visit to a family home could last anywhere from an hour to two hours. One depending on the number of people who live in the home and who are at home at the time to talk to. Then there are other family visits that are very brief and that is typically when family is not as engaged with us not wanting to talk about what the allegations are and just really not comfortable with the fact that we're there and keeps the conversation very brief and limits the amount

of time that's spent there. Often times caseworkers will give that family a second chance at sitting down and talking again, coming back another day, maybe they've had some time to decompress a little bit think about what this is all about and then that second visit sometimes is longer.

Ch. 9: Do you find the parents who physically abuse their children do they feel bad about it after do they have time to reflect do they realize that I shouldn't really do this, or do they beat the children even more because they are angry that someone has stepped in and they are angry that the child may have said something.

R. I think that's what we all fear is that there will be consequences to the child if we come out and talk to the family and then leave that's what's going to happen. My experience has been most of the time these parents are very remorseful. They love their kids just like the rest of us love our kids. They just have a lot of stressors and different things and maybe not the supporters like you and I might have and things happen. It's rare, in fact I can't even think of a case where a parent has meant to harm their child and will do it again. Sometimes when they are angry they'll threaten to us this is how I was raised and I'll do it again that's my right as a parent but parent's don't intend to hurt their children. I've had experiences with they didn't even realize they left a bruise, so it's very powerful to show the parent look at your child's leg and look what happened. I've seen parents break down crying, oh my I never meant to do that, I just wanted to teach them not to act this way or do this thing, whatever, and I don't know how to do this differently, this is how I was raised so I spanked them, I never meant to leave a bruise.

Ch. 9: Hearing you say that certainly I can understand that would be the case for most parents. However there would still be some who end up doing something that kills their child. Help us understand a little bit how that type of thing happens, how does it get to that point?

R. Well we can sit here and we can look at a family situation when it gets to the point and how that happens, but my experience is that most of the time they are usually small children so exhausted lacking resources as far as financial resources, support resources, sometimes these are single parents who just don't have someone to turn to when they are getting tired, getting frustrated, getting angry, because the child won't stop doing something, crying, making a mess, or whatever that is. And they just lack the resources and the skill to just say I need to put the child in a safe place and just walk away for a minute because I am getting really frustrated and angry. So again even in those horrific cases I don't think that those parents meant to kill their children, it's just all the factors that were going on at the moment, unfortunately that's what happened.

Ch. 9: I understand that certain cases are rare where the child does die. But I look at the case where the boy starved in the linen closet and I just think to myself, are those parents so different from anyone else that we are talking about, is that a case where you almost can't even think of it in terms of what you and I are talking about? Help our viewers to understand how you see that and those parents must have known something was happening and I so angry that situation happened and I know our viewers are as well. How do we wrap our heads around that.

R. As are we, we don't like to see kids hurt and we most certainly don't like to see kids die either. It's hard for me to get in the head of that parent and say what they were thinking and what they were doing

so it's all speculation on my part as to how that happened. Sometimes we see situations where parents are so angry at the other parent and this child reminds them so much of that other parent that they do things based on that. We've seen things where parents are so fearful of our system or even their relatives that's the last thing they want they don't want the child going into our system or with anyone else, the absent parent the other mom or dad, the other parent they ending up killing the child because they don't want anyone else to have the child. I remember seeing in homicide/suicide situations where the parent takes their own life as well as their child's life. I don't know that I could ever try to guess why that happens.

Ch. 9: You mentioned that people are fearful of the system, can you talk about that?

R. I think that Human Services is really a viewed in a negative light.

Ch. 9: You might as well stop for a second. I just think that our viewers when they hear that they could say that they could abuse people. And I want to give an opportunity to say that the death of those people rarely happens, that's not typical. So people the community is often fearful they are scared of DHS and the workers. What do say to them, why do you think that's the case.

R. I think it's the case because of how you get your training, different television programs, Disney movies, news stories that we don't ask enough questions, we don't do enough and we come in and just take your kids away from you without asking any questions about it. And so I think it's that misperception that has people fearful of what we do. And really a lack of understanding of what we really do. And so if I could get a message across at all, our intent really is to help you. We recognize that you want to be a good parent you love your kids and you want to do best by them. And sometimes that's hard, sometimes you struggle for a variety of different reasons. But we have lots of resources and lots of different options available and if we could just sit down and have a conversation with you we could find out what those resources might be that your family needs. Now sometimes I think that the immediate answer is that your child does need to stay somewhere else because things are so out of control and so unsafe for your child. Until we can kind of calm that storm we need to make sure that your child is in a safe place. But our goal is while that child is in that safe place is to help you get the resources and skills that you need so that they can come back and you can parent how you wanted to parent in the first place.

Ch. 9: What has differential response done in terms of changing the system?

R. I think differential response has been an amazing new approach to child welfare. And what differential response is recognizing that one size doesn't fit all. That not all child abuse case are the same. And so how we would intervene with a family who has seriously injured their child, to where they have ended up in the hospital or may die should look very different that how we intervene with a family who is struggling to put food on the table who maybe out of frustration slapped their child or hit their child or caused a bruise. Those are very different situations and we shouldn't treat them the same way. So differential response which really means that we have a dual track system, we have two different ways we can respond has allowed us to have a less forensic type approach to those low to moderate cases where we can come in we don't go see the child at school without the parent's knowledge, we

don't come into the home separate everybody and interrogate them as people think that we do but we gather around the kitchen table, we gather around the living room and say what's going well for your family, what are the things you like to do, what are the things you do together. What are the areas that you struggle, what are the behaviors about your child that you find difficult or annoying, what are the things in your marriage or your partnership relationship that you find difficult. How are finances, are you able to pay your bills, are you able to put food on the table and we just talk about that, figure out what are the things that we have that might be able to help you, what can we connect you with in your community, what resources, maybe you are depressed, what resources are there from mental health and maybe we can help you with that. Who are your support, how can we engage them in a way, like maybe once a week Mom could really use a break and she got two hours to herself. And kiddo could really have a great time spending those two hours with his uncle and have a male adult in his life. And let's make that happen and that's the approach we want to be able to take and differential response allows us to take.

Ch. 9: What have you learned with differential response, in terms of when you show up there, I like that part of what we saw is you ask what's going well. I like that when you first walk in there that's one of the first questions you talk about. I can give you an example of my boss I hate you for this, this and this, but you're alright for this and this that I would be so turned off by that point. So maybe you can kind of talk about what you've learned and how do people react how do parents react when you are able to come in and use the differential response, the non-inclusive finding type of thing.

R. I think what we've learned, most importantly, is that people are more willing to talk to us and share with us what their struggles are if we approach them and say this is your family, you're the expert on your family, this is your home that you've allowed me into. They are much more willing to be open with us and be honest with us about what their struggles are and where the areas are that they maybe need some help on. While previously they were afraid to say, yeah I spank my child and I use a belt because I don't know anything different to do. They know maybe that's not an ok way to parent, but they are afraid maybe to tell us that because their afraid of what might happen. But when we come in recognizing that they are the expert on their family being respectful of their home and their time, they open up much more to us and tell us what's going on so that we can really be a help. And I don't want to paint that we weren't respectful before. I think we had some ideas about how we needed to do things, such as talking to a child before their parents knew we were talking to them. We still did that with respect and we still explained why we did that. But we are recognizing that maybe that wasn't necessary, maybe it alarms every parent what do you mean you saw my child at school without me knowing, and so right off the bat we're set up to have this tension in our relationship, vs. saying hey we would like to have a conversation with you and your child. By the way are you comfortable with us coming inside and talking to your child? Most of the times they say sure.

Ch. 9: In cases where there's a serious injury to a child risk of death, risk of serious injury you don't take that approach.

R. Correct, correct. And those assessments need to be more forensic focused, and by forensic focused we really need to look at what happened, how did it happen, who did it to the child, so that we really

can ensure safety of that child and any siblings that are in the home. So the approach on those is different and that's the whole premise of differential response, is that it's not a one size fits all. Higher risk more severe cases are treated in this more forensic fashion and the low to moderate risk cases are treated more in the family engagement process of help us to understand what's going on with you.

Ch. 9: So looking at some statistics here, and I understand that there are used to be a if three tips came in concerning abuse that you had to respond. And when we look at some numbers here about 3,700 cases or investigations were not done when they should have been done base on that three call rule. Help us understand why that was the case.

R. Let me explain the rule a little bit. The rule was, if this was the third phone call on the family and the two previous phone calls on this family had been what we call screen out, so the hotline at the county gathered the information, supervisors reviewed the information, and decided it didn't meet the criteria of child abuse or neglect, therefore we didn't have the authority to go out and meet with the family. So those previous two assessments were screened out. The rule was if a third referral came in about this family you had to assign it because the previous two had been screened out. What happened there was it was an arbitrary number of three and it really didn't matter the content of the report, what was being reported, what was the decision behind why the previous two had been screened out, what had happened, it was just if this is the third one you had to assign it and you had to go out. What we finding is that we were going out on things that weren't child abuse or neglect. So we were going out in situations where, maybe someone called to say, these child's clothes don't fit properly and they look a little disheveled. Concerning yes, but not child abuse or neglect. But we'd have to go. So now we're intervening if it's things like we're creating a little fear and discomfort for this family because child protection is showing up at their door because of this report. The other thing we were discovering is some folks were catching on to this rule that we had and so they would call three times in a row just to get central services to respond. And we would see those sometimes in custody situation, between divorced parents, where they have figured out this rule and they were just causing social services to keep coming out on that other parent.

Ch. 9: When that rule was in place though, why didn't the state go to those 3,700 cases and investigate them.

R. I think part of the problem is that the rule was also confusing. So some counties interpreted the rule that if this was the third call, they still had discretion to whether or not it met criteria to assign it for investigation. So they would document that no, it didn't meet the criteria and they would screen it out. Other counties interpreted the rule that it didn't matter, you didn't have any discretion you had to automatically assign. I to had confusion about what that rule meant when I was working in the county, did it mean you always had to go or you still had the discretion of screening it out. And so that's where you are seeing 3,000 that didn't get assigned. We have since changed that rule in recognizing that it doesn't matter the number of referrals that we get, what matters is that we take a good look at that previous history, what was the allegation, who was the person involved, who is the identifier, the victim, what's the situation, have services ever been offered to this family before, and really took some time to look at do we have a pattern here, do we have what looks to be like someone causing trouble for

someone else and really slow down and take the time to look at each one of these and what the intervention was rather than a magic number that says you must go out.

Ch. 9: You guys say change, has the law changed or is it a policy change?

R. It's a policy change.

Ch. 9: Ok. So as we're looking at some child fatality reports here, 52 at the time we were able to review at the time we did this, 31 found violations of State Child abuse code. And we started looking at the cases the average number of violations or the average number of things that were not done or should have been done at DHS was four. Is that an alarming number?

R. Yes and no. Can I back up a little bit. What I'd like to say, when you talk about child abuse code I'm assuming that you are talking about volume 7 which is our policy and regulations so that's the policy that we outline at the state level that says every investigation must include these steps. Every ongoing case must include these steps and it spells them all out and that we must do that every time. Now if I were to look back and look at what those four various violations were, none are them are causing to the child dying. What they typically are is paperwork questions. So there is a rule that say if your assessment or investigation is going to take longer than 30 days to complete you must request and extension from your supervisor to have more than 30 days. So some of those policy violations were that didn't happen. That the caseworker just didn't make the request from their supervisor to have an opened up longer than 30 days. That's typical in especially high difficult case like this where you're engaging mom, you're engaging with medical professionals, you've got lots of people you need to interview. The caseworker needs to make a decision between I'm at day 30 and I need to get that request asked of my supervisor or this detective is going out to interview this alleged suspect on this case, which one should I go do? I'm going to go with the detective and interview the suspect and I'm going to be late on making that exception. So those are the majority of what those violations are, paperwork type reasons. What we have shifted our practice to, is recognizing it's not fair to a particular caseworker or a county to say that while we identified these four practice violations you didn't do these things in this one case, is that true to how you practice county wide? And so what we've taken to looking at is identifying what they missed from doing some of the policies and procedures but then looking at their review data, our administration review division does a review every six months with the larger counties and so we compare, is this a trend that they see on a random sample of their cases that they are always missing this policy, or is this an isolated on this one case that they missed this policy because they chose to go out with this detective.

Ch. 9: My understanding is that you've looked at those same fatality reports and you've been able to see if any of the problems were identified in no cases was it the caseworker didn't go visit the home, that the caseworker didn't follow through on repeat business.

R. That is correct. I think what we've seen sometimes is that the caseworker's required to see the child every 30 days. So there may have been incidents where they saw the child on day 35 so that's a policy violation because they were supposed to have seen the child within 30. They still saw the child but it was late.

Ch. 9: How has discipline changed at all for caseworkers. Is there a need for more discipline, or do you ever fire caseworkers, is there a need to do that.

R. That's handled at the county level, so each county's human resources department and their administration makes decisions about the type of discipline that they are going to engage with the caseworker when they find performance issues, so it's difficult for me to say when a caseworker should be fired, since I've been in this position I've never been brought into those conversations, of how discipline cases should take place at the county.

Ch. 9: You mentioned some things about we found important as hard as it is to say this, it's not the caseworkers that end up killing these children and I thought I would give you an opportunity to share those thoughts.

R. Ok. What I can share with you is I attended a training by a gentleman by in New Zealand, the training was here, I wish it was in New Zealand, but who has spent much of his life, career, studying child abuse fatalities and the response by child protective services and one comment that he made that really stuck with me, is that when there's a homicide the public doesn't look to the police department and say what did the police department do wrong that this homicide occurred. And unfortunately that's not what happens when a child dies. When a child dies the public tends to look at what did the agency do wrong, what did they miss that caused this child to die. And so what I can say to you is the caseworkers don't kill these children, their parents do. And we need to remember that, we need to keep the focus on the person who actually killed this child and what we do about that. Whether we punish them, rehabilitate them, whatever the decision is. Now do caseworkers and departments make mistakes? Of course they make mistakes. We all make mistakes. Can we learn from our mistakes and do things differently, or better or identify gaps in policies, or maybe we do need a new law, or maybe we do a new policy that might help us to try to prevent future deaths. Absolutely.

Ch. 9: Does the system have problems?

R. Of course it does, I think any large system has problems. I think the key is being aware that you have problems and continuing to strive and work towards improving those, and I think we have a lot of dedicated staff, this is their passion, this is what they love, they love their job, they love what they do, they love trying to make a difference in trying to help families and so I think they are always trying to better.

Ch. 9: What problems are in the system?

R. I think some of the struggles are that the ones you hear all the time, we are a very overburdened system, our economic times are not helping with that, families are struggling and so the number of calls that comes into counties about children not being cared for and mistreated has gone up. The number of hours that caseworkers put into caseloads is already very high but we have increased calls it gets even higher. Paperwork is burdensome. I think everyone recognizes that paperwork is important that is the only way for this caseworker to communicate to the next people what has happened. What those family strengths are what their needs are. One of the things we've worked on with them, but that paperwork takes time.

Ch. 9: What would help improve the system?

Liz. Hey Jace, it might be better if the policy related questions you reserved for Reggie and the governor, cause Ruby is a practitioner.

Ch. 9: Sure I'm interested to hear what from your level and the people that you talk to think?

R. You know what I think would really help is that we need to recognize that child abuse and neglect is a community issue. It's not just an issue of child welfare and the government; it's all of our problem. And we all together collectively hold the solution and so how do we work better with one another, how do we work better with the school to say where are the ??? so when you have this child in the classroom who has ill fitting clothes and maybe smells poorly and is being made fun of, are there resources and things at this point that you can do to help out. How can we work better with our mental health system and our substance abuse providers system, so that families and their children can get the services that they need to try to address the issues of mental health and substance abuse. I think the biggest thing that would help us is being able to work better together and sometimes some of the things that hinder that are rules and laws around confidentiality. Rather important and while I think we need respect families rights to privacy sometimes they block us from being able to share information that needed for all of the people who have eyes on this kiddo.

Ch. 9: What do you mean by that? What would be an example of that?

R. Well I think that if you think about a child spends six hours a day at school and the teacher and the people at school they are the ones that see and interact with this child every day. And a referral comes in and we're working with the family but we can't share with the teacher that sees this child every day some of the intricacies and details of what's going on and the work that we are doing with them, some of the red flags and alarms that we want them to be aware of so that you can call us when that happens. An example I could give you in a reviewing of a particular case a call made to the county concerned about how a child reacted to taking home a note, a poor progress report, about school. Well shortly after that the child was withdrawn from school. When the school didn't connect that social services was involved and that maybe it would be worth knowing that they should call social services, oh by the way that child has been withdrawn from the school. Might not have been something that we can do but it might have been a great way to connect some dots. So there are just places where we struggle to communicate with each other.

Ch. 9: Can you give us, I know this is tough, can you give us an example of when you would take the child away, what would be this is the example, yes there is an immediate need to try to find an alternative place, this would be an example of being moderate, and this would be something that is low.

R. Sure

Ch. 9: You kind of did, but I want to see if we can compare it. I think that's the question that everyone has, what is child abuse? We know the law, we've looked at the law together, but

R. First of all I just want to say that this is the hardest part of the job, this is that varying shades of grey. There is no real black and white, this is something that's severe this is something that's medium, this is something that's minor, this is how they would all play out. We're all human so we all have different factors that play in and no one situation is identical to another situation.

Ch. 9: An example of that, the kid has a broken arm and it is something that mom wasn't watching the kid as she went to the park with the neighbor kid. Or something like that or that might be a differential response because there was serious injury to the kid the mom was neglectful but it wasn't necessarily a purposeful thing vs.

R. Mom broke the arm

Ch. 9: So if Mom broke the arm, if Mom got angry enough and took the rolling pin and she hit the kid and broke his arm that probably wouldn't fall under the moderate or low.

R. Correct.

Ch. 9: So give me some examples if you can, I don't want to put words in your mouth

R. I can I just want you to know that there just examples and it's not this is always this way and this is always that way.

Ch. 9: I think, as long as what I repeated back to you makes sense, then I think I understand.

Dee. Jace, hold on just a sec, Jace we have to be a little careful here, our concern is, Ruby gives specific examples, somebody out there relates to that example and says but I wasn't treated that way, or this wasn't moderate when it happened to me and there may be a lot of other circumstances around that. So for her to give very specific examples is very difficult especially if you are going to air them.

R. That's my fear to, someone will say well I had broken arm or my ex wife broke my kids arm and you didn't do anything about it.

Dee. I think the key here to is every case is not that simple. I mean that in the year I've been here not a single one is mom took out the rolling pin and whacked the kid. There's a history, there's other things going on or there's

Ch. 9: Instead of an example can you give us, if there's a severe injury can we talk about it that way even if you don't give us a specific example.

Dee. Say it one more time.

Liz. If he can say if a child is severely injured.

Ch. 9: I hate to not push you guys on this, not because I'm trying to be tough but just because this is the question that people want to know is

R. What we are trying to say is in volume 7, we have some definitions about what is low, moderate and severe.

Dee. I think if you use your definitions which are in rule that would work, but to give examples is where we get into that, it wouldn't work well for anyone.

R. So what I can tell you is we talked about volume 7 rules and regulations. That's the policy guide that guides caseworkers in making decisions. And so what is in there is definitions of what meets minor, moderate and severe. So the definition for severe abuse or neglect is that it requires medical attention. So it could be something that happened physically that it requires medical attention for the child or it could be something that was a neglectful situation that required medical attention for the child. Medium would be may require medical attention. So there's some discretion there, that whatever the physical incident that occurred, would most people take their child to the doctor, or would some people take their child to the doctor. The same is true for a neglect situation. Whatever is being neglected would it result in the child may need to get medical attention. And in low there's little to no impact to the child. So in minor physical neglect or abuse, is may leave bruising or swelling of the skin that's in the statute but most people wouldn't seek medical care for that. Neglect would be the same thing, it's a minor situation that most people would do something about but it has little to no impact to the child.

Ch. 9: You discussed earlier the child care action community or child (inaudible) child action committee? Tell us what that is.

Liz. It doesn't exist any more.

R. It was in 2008.

Ch. 9: Is that a study that was done a group that came together to look at things that need to be changed? Anything else that you want to add then that I haven't asked?

R. I would just add that I think that it's been important for us to have this opportunity to open our doors and show what child welfare is intended to be and that our goal really is to keep things together, healthy, safely, because we know that is the best place for children to be in their families that they can be safe.

Dee. Ruby do you want to talk about the Governor's Child Welfare plan and what that's meant for you guys over the last 6 to 8 months. No you don't want to.

R. No, only because I don't think I can speak to it with as much confidence as I have the rest of the interview.

Dee. Everything that you've talked about has been a portion of that so you'll be able to tie it back when Reggie talks about it.

Ch. 9: Are the child welfare workers, are they overwhelmed.

R. Yes, I mean this is an overwhelming job. But what we do is know that and like I said it's a passion, it gets inside you and you can't help it, but yes it's overwhelming. It's hard to listen to families everyday struggles and the things that they are going through because they are hard, these families are facing some really hard stuff. And it's hard to just say oh it's five o'clock I'm going to turn that off and not think about that anymore. So yeah, so not only do they work the eight hour day but then they take it home at night and on weekends and keep playing through in their head.

Ch. 9: And the state doesn't pay these people overtime.

R. No

Liz. It's probably important Ruby to distinguish between it's nature of the work as opposed to the caseload.

R. Sure, what I would say, the nature of the job by interacting with people and interacting with them on such a personal emotional level, hearing about all their struggles and their triumphs and all of that, it's hard not to take that personally and so the nature of the job is that you really become invested in the client that you are working with. So it's hard to just turn that off at five o'clock and so you still think about it during the weekend or during the evening you see a television program or something reminds you of a client and you start thinking about it again. So I think the caseworker can be the families biggest advocate and cheerleader. They are rooting for these folks to do well and be the kind of parents that they envision being and so they are always right there with them and you just can't turn that off.

Ch. 9: Do you see that there's a time when it's even possible to eliminate children who die because of their parents?

R. That's a really hard question to answer, I can't predict human nature, I can't say what a person is going to do and I think that's one of the hardest part for a caseworker is going into a family home, really getting to know them, talking about what the struggles are and walking away hoping that that was the right decision. Hoping that they were honest with you that they told you everything, that some life moment won't happen tonight, tomorrow or the next day that changed everything that they just told you. That's the crystal ball part of this, we don't know.