

South Carolina Department of Social Services
Child Welfare Quality Assurance Review: Cherokee County

This report describes the results of the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) Cherokee County Child Welfare Quality Assurance Review, conducted April 23 – 27, 2012.

DSS Child Welfare Quality Assurance Reviews are conducted using the *Onsite Review Instrument* (OSRI) finalized by the federal Administration for Children & Families (ACF) in July 2008. This instrument is used to review foster care and treatment services cases.

The OSRI is divided into three sections: safety; permanency; and child and family well-being. There are two safety outcomes, two permanency outcomes, and three well-being outcomes. Reviewers collect information on a number of items related to each of the outcomes. The ratings for each item are combined to determine the rating for the outcome. Outcomes are rated as being substantially achieved, partially achieved, not achieved, or not applicable. The items are rated as strength, area needing improvement, or not applicable. Ratings for each of the outcomes are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Child Welfare QA Onsite Reviews – Ratings by Outcome

Outcome	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved
Safety 1 <i>Children Are, First and Foremost, Protected from Abuse and Neglect</i>	100% (6)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Safety 2 <i>Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate</i>	80% (16)	5% (1)	15% (3)
Permanency 1 <i>Children have permanency and stability in their living situations</i>	10% (1)	70% (7)	20% (2)
Permanency 2 <i>The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children</i>	50% (5)	40% (4)	10% (1)
Well-Being 1 <i>Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs</i>	45% (9)	30% (6)	25% (5)
Well-Being 2 <i>Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs</i>	75% (6)	0% (0)	25% (2)
Well-Being 3 <i>Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs</i>	61% (11)	22% (4)	17% (3)

Results for outcomes and items are reported by the number of cases and the percentage of total cases given each rating. In addition, the percentage of strengths is calculated for each item. This percentage is calculated by adding the number of strengths and the number of areas needing improvement. The number of strengths is divided into this total to determine the percentage of strengths.

Twenty cases were reviewed including ten foster care and ten in-home treatment cases. Quality Assurance staff conducted a more in-depth analysis on items where 50 percent or fewer cases received a strength rating. These results can be found in Table 9.

SECTION I: REVIEW FINDINGS

Safety Outcome 1: Children Are, First and Foremost, Protected from Abuse and Neglect

Two items are included under Safety Outcome 1. Ratings for the two items are shown in Table 2.

Item 1: Timeliness of initiating investigations

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether responses to all accepted child maltreatment reports received during the period under review were initiated and face-to-face contact with the child made, within the timeframes established by agency policies or State statute.

Table 2.

Rating	Item 1	Item 2
Strength	30%(6)	30%(6)
Area Needing Improvement	0%(0)	0%(0)
Not Applicable	70%(14)	70%(14)
Total	100%(20)	100%(20)
% Strengths	100%(6)	100%(6)

Item 2: Repeat maltreatment

Purpose of Assessment: To determine if any child in the family experienced repeat maltreatment within a 6-month period.

Safety Outcome 2: Children Are Safely Maintained in their Homes Whenever Possible and Appropriate

Two items are included under Safety Outcome 2. Ratings for the items are shown in Table 3.

Item 3: Services to family

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, the agency made concerted efforts to provide services to the family to prevent children’s entry into foster care or re-entry after a reunification.

Table 3.

Rating	Item 3	Item 4
Strength	35%(7)	80%(16)
Area Needing Improvement	15%(3)	20%(4)
Not Applicable	50%(10)	0%(0)
Total	100%(20)	100%(20)
% Strengths	70%(7)	80%(16)

Item 4: Risk assessment and safety management

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, the agency made concerted efforts to assess and address the risk and safety concerns relating to the child(ren) in their own homes or while in foster care.

Permanency Outcome 1: Children have Permanency and Stability in their Living Situations

Six items are included under Permanency Outcome 1. Ratings for the items are shown in Table 4.

Item 5: Foster Care reentries

Purpose of Assessment: To assess whether children who entered foster care during the period under review were re-entering within 12 months of a prior foster care episode.

Item 6: Stability of foster care placement

Purpose of Assessment: To determine if the child in foster care is in a stable placement at the time of the onsite review and that any changes in placement that occurred during the period under

review were in the best interest of the child and consistent with achieving the child’s permanency goal(s).

Item 7: Permanency goal for child

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether appropriate permanency goals were established for the child in a timely manner.

Item 8: Reunification, guardianship or permanent placement with relatives

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether concerted efforts were made, or are being made, during the period under review, to achieve reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner.

Item 9: Adoption

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made, or are being made, to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner.

Item 10: Other planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA)

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, the agency made concerted efforts to ensure:

- That the child is adequately prepared to make the transition from foster care to independent living (if it is expected that the child will remain in foster care until he or she reaches the age of majority or is emancipated).
- That the child, even though remaining in foster care, is in a “permanent” living arrangement with a foster parent or relative caregiver and that there is a commitment on the part of all parties involved that the child remain in that placement until he or she reaches the age of majority or is emancipated.
- That the child is in a long-term care facility and will remain in that facility until transition to an adult care facility.

Table 4.

Rating	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8	Item 9	Item 10
Strength	5%(1)	30%(6)	15%(3)	10%(2)	0%(0)	0%(0)
Area Needing Improvement	0%(0)	20%(4)	35%(7)	15%(3)	25%(5)	10%(2)
Not Applicable	95%(19)	50%(10)	50%(10)	75%(15)	75%(15)	90%(18)
Total	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)
% Strengths	100%(1)	60%(6)	30%(3)	40%(2)	0%(0)	0%(0)

Permanency Outcome 2: The Continuity of Family Relationships and Connections is Preserved for Children

Six items are included under Permanency Outcome 2. Ratings for the items are shown in Table 5.

Item 11: Proximity of Foster Care Placement

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made to ensure that the child’s foster care placement was close enough to the parent(s) to facilitate face-to-face contact between the child and the parent(s) while the child was in foster care.

Item 12: Placement with siblings

Purpose of Assessment: To determine if, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made to ensure that siblings in foster care are placed together unless a separation was necessary to meet the needs of one of the siblings.

Item 13: Visiting with parents & siblings in foster care

Purpose of Assessment: To determine if, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made to ensure that visitation between a child in foster care and his or her mother, father, and siblings is of sufficient frequency and quality to promote continuity in the child’s relationship with these close family members.

Item 14: Preserving connections

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made to maintain the child’s connections to his or her neighborhood, community, faith, extended family, tribe, school, and friends.

Item 15: Relative placement

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made to place the child with relatives when appropriate.

Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made to promote, support, and/or maintain positive relationships between the child in foster care and his or her mother and father or other primary caregiver(s) from whom the child had been removed through activities other than just arranging for visitation.

Table 5.

Rating	Item 11	Item 12	Item 13	Item 14	Item 15	Item 16
Strength	25%(5)	30%(6)	5%(1)	35%(7)	15%(3)	5%(1)
Area Needing Improvement	0%(0)	0%(0)	30%(6)	10%(2)	20%(4)	25%(5)
Not Applicable	75%(15)	70%(14)	65%(13)	55%(11)	65%(13)	70%(14)
Total	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)
% Strengths	100%(5)	100%(6)	14.3%(1)	77.8%(7)	42.9%(3)	16.7%(1)

Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have Enhanced Capacity to Provide for their Children’s Needs

Four items are included under Well-Being Outcome 1. Ratings for the items are shown in Table 6.

Item 17: Needs and services of child, parents, & foster parents

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, the agency made concerted efforts to assess the needs of children, parents, and foster parents (both at the child’s entry into foster care [if the child entered during the period under review] or on an ongoing basis) to identify the services necessary to achieve case goals and adequately address the issues relevant to the agency’s involvement with the family, and provided the appropriate services.

Item 18: Child & family involvement in case planning

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made (or are being made) to involve parents and children (if developmentally appropriate) in the case planning process on an ongoing basis.

Table 6.

Rating	Item 17	Item 18	Item 19	Item 20
Strength	45%(9)	45%(9)	75%(15)	25%(5)
Area Needing Improvement	55%(11)	50%(10)	25%(5)	55%(11)
Not Applicable	0%(0)	5%(1)	0%(0)	20%(4)
Total	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)
% Strengths	45%(9)	47.4%(9)	75%(15)	31.3%(5)

Item 19: Caseworker visits with the child

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and the child(ren) in the case are sufficient to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child and promote achievement of case goals.

Item 20: Caseworker visits with parents

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and the mothers and fathers of the children are sufficient to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the children and promote achievement of case goals.

Well-Being Outcome 2: Children Receive Appropriate Services to Meet their Educational Needs

One item is included under Well-Being Outcome 2. Ratings for the item are shown in Table 7.

Item 21: Educational needs of child

Purpose of Assessment: To assess whether, during the period under review, the agency made concerted efforts to assess children’s educational needs at the initial contact with the child (if the case was opened during the period under review) or on an ongoing basis (if the case was opened before the period under review), and whether identified needs were appropriately addressed in case planning and case management activities.

Table 7.

Rating	Item 21
Strength	30%(6)
Area Needing Improvement	10%(2)
Not Applicable	60%(12)
Total	100%(20)
% Strengths	75%(6)

Well-Being Outcome 3: Children Receive Adequate Services to Meet their Physical and Mental Health Needs

Two items are included under Well-Being Outcome 3. Ratings for the items are shown in Table 8.

Item 22: Physical health of child

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, the agency addressed the physical health needs of the child, including dental health needs.

Table 8.

Rating	Item 22	Item 23
Strength	55%(11)	50%(10)
Area Needing Improvement	25%(5)	20%(4)
Not Applicable	20%(4)	30%(6)
Total	100%(20)	100%(20)
% Strengths	68.8%(11)	71.4%(10)

Item 23: Mental/behavioral health of child

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, the agency addressed the mental/behavioral health needs of the child(ren).

Summary

The Review Teams identified several concerns while conducting the Quality Assurance Review in Cherokee County. These concerns were noted in the Exit Conference conducted by the Review Team leaders immediately after the QA Review was completed.

- Risk and safety was not assessed for some of the children. Specifically, in cases that are managed by the Intensive Foster Care and Clinical Services (IFCCS) office. There appeared to be confusion between the county office and the IFCCS office regarding which office was responsible for assessing the safety of the children remaining in the home. As a result, some safety assessments on these children were not regularly completed.
- The county did not file for the termination of parental rights (TPR) in a timely manner (after the children have been in care 15 of the most recent 22 months) for some children especially those case managed by IFCCS.
- In some cases, visits between the target child and parents and the target child and siblings are not occurring as required by state policy.
- The needs and services of some children and parents are not being assessed and there is no follow-up on any identified services.
- Often, non-custodial parents, particularly the fathers, are not being engaged in the case planning process.
- Appropriate permanency goals for children are not being established in a timely manner for all children.
- A motion for a hearing to assess safety and risk when dealing with non-cooperating parents has not been requested in a timely manner.

Table 9. Summary of Issues Causing Area Needs Improvement Ratings for Items Rating Less Than 50% Strengths

Item #	Item Description	Issues Summary
7	Permanency goal for child	For Item 7, 30% of the cases were rated as a strength. For those rated as an area needing improvement, the agency failed to establish a permanency plan in a timely manner. In one case, the permanency goal of reunification with the birth mother was not appropriate due to her inability to provide stable housing, secure employment, or provide the necessary level of care that the target child requires. The mother had the goal of reunification for more than two years without any success. The concurrent/secondary goal of Adoption was not considered timely because it was established almost two years after the target child entered care.
8	Reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives	For Item 8, cases received an area needing improvement because the agency did not make concerted efforts to achieve custody or guardianship with a relative in a timely manner. In one case, the documentation supports that the target child identified an adult sibling with whom he wanted to reside; however, the agency failed to assess this relative for custody or placement of the target child. In another case, the agency failed to engage the mother in case planning so that she could be assessed and move forward with either her rehabilitation or the termination of her parental rights which the mother had indicated she wanted from the onset of the case.
9	Adoption	Item 9 had no cases rated as strengths. For Item 9, the agency did not make efforts to finalize adoptions in a timely manner.
10	Other planned perm living arrangement	Item 10 had no cases rated as strengths. For Item 10, the agency failed to take action to create an agreement with the group home, verbal or written, to state the group home's commitment to keep the child until emancipation.
13	Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care	For Item 13, one case was rated as a strength. Cases were rated as area needing improvement because there were insufficient visits coordinated between the parents and the target child.
15	Relative placement	For Item 15, the agency did not demonstrate efforts to identify and locate relatives with whom the child could be placed. In the three cases analyzed, this related to maternal relatives.
16	Relationship of child in care with parents	Regarding Item 16, concerted efforts were not made to promote, support, or maintain positive relationships between the target child and the parents.
17	Needs & services for child, parents, caregivers	For Item 17, cases were rated as area needing improvement because the agency failed to adequately assess and provide services for the family. In one case, the agency did not conduct

Item #	Item Description	Issues Summary
		monthly, on-going assessments of the needs of the father to provide updated information for case planning.
18	Child & family involvement in case planning	For Item 18, the agency did not make concerted efforts to include the child and parents in case planning. In one case, the agency did not make concerted efforts to actively involve the father in the case planning process because the agency did not involve the birth father in the case. The agency provided DNA testing to the birth father during the PUR and confirmed paternity. The agency is aware of the birth father's whereabouts in the neighboring county/state. No case record or case-related interviews revealed any restrictions or court involvement that specifically addresses or recommends disengagement with the father.
20	Worker visits with parents	Regarding Item 20, the frequency of visits between the agency and parents were not sufficient to address issues related to safety, permanency, and well-being. Also, quality visits were not being conducted. In one case, the agency made no effort to locate the father and did not visit the mother in her home or at the agency.

SECTION II: FOSTER CARE LICENSE REVIEW

As part of the Quality Assurance Review Process in Cherokee County, ten Foster Home Licenses were randomly selected from the list of all licenses issued by the county during the period under review. These licenses were reviewed using the *SC Department of Social Services Foster License Review Instrument*. This instrument consists of three sections. Section One focuses on the issuance of the Initial/Standard License. Section Two focuses on the standard license renewal process. Section Three focuses on agency oversight, data entry, and qualitative issues. Each section of the instrument includes the appropriate agency, state, and federal requirements.

Section One review criteria include the following items:

- applications
- autobiography information
- financial information
- child factor’s checklists
- initial home assessment studies
- references
- information related to firearms and ammunition in the house
- pet vaccination information
- background checks
- documents and CAPPS
- convictions
- required trainings
- medical reports
- fire inspections/re-inspections
- discipline agreements
- disaster preparedness plans
- alternative caregiver forms
- a review of any conflicts noted between file

Section Two review criteria include the following items:

- convictions
- training hours
- medical reports
- updated home studies
- discipline agreements
- fire inspections and drills
- quarterly home visits
- disaster preparedness plans
- annual firearms location update
- information concerning the alternative caregivers
- a review of initial background checks
- safety checks of alternative caregivers
- a review of child protective service allegations
- pet vaccination information
- a review of any regulatory infractions
- a review of any conflicts noted between file documents and CAPPS

All of the requirements evaluated in Sections One and Two of this instrument must be met for the foster home license to be valid. If any items are rated as not met, the foster home license is considered invalid. Federal funds cannot be used for board payments for any foster children in the home during the time the license was invalid. Areas noted as having occurred as required on the assessment are rated as strengths. Those items that were not met are rated as an area needing improvement (ANI). If the issue is not applicable, it is rated N/A.

Table 10. Summary of Ratings for Sections One and Two

Rating	Section One	Section Two
Strength	1(10%)	2(20%)
Area Needing Improvement	1(10%)	6(60%)
Not Applicable	8(80%)	2(20%)
Total	10(100%)	10(100%)
% Strengths	50%	25%

Additionally, the percentage of strengths is also calculated for each item. This percentage is calculated by adding the number of strengths and the number of ANIs. The number of strengths is divided into this total to determine the percentage of strengths. Results of the review in Cherokee County are noted in Table 10.

Two issues were identified in Section One that led to a rating of Area Needing Improvement (ANI) on one case:

1. The medical records on all household members were not located.
2. The Disaster Preparedness form, financial data, and Child Factor checklist were completed but are not dated as required by Policy Sections 916 & 918.

Issues identified in Section Two that led to the rating of ANI for six cases include:

1. Re-Assessment Summary and the Sexual Offenders check on both foster parents were not completed or were completed after license date.
2. Training hours for foster parent did not total the required 28 hours.
3. A Re-Assessment indicated that one set of foster parents identified their 20-year-old son as the babysitter when the children are not in daycare; but there is no CPS, SO and Criminal Background check completed for the adult son.
4. The Pet Vaccination Certificates were not updated prior to the issuing updated license.
5. There was no pet vaccination records were noted on file when a pet was noted in the record.
6. There was one child in the home when the license expired.
7. The Discipline Agreement forms were not always completed yearly as required per policy.
8. Disaster Preparedness forms were not always completed yearly as required per policy, or were not completed prior to the renewal of the license.
9. FBI safety checks were not completed as required.
10. There was no annual firearms form in the file.
11. There were no medical reports filed for the children.
12. The information regarding the status of the fire drills was not legible. Therefore, it could not be determined when the drills were held.
13. No medical records were noted for foster parent in the file.
14. A sexual offender check was not completed on foster child who is 15 years old; sexual offender should be completed on all children over the age of 12.
15. The sexual offender checks were not completed yearly as required.
16. Complaints regarding care of children 4/26 & 9/13/2011 were noted in the file; however, there is no documentation in the record, QV guide or CAPSS as to whether or not the anonymous complaints were addressed with the foster parents.
17. An alternative caregiver was identified at initial licensing, but according to the QV guide an alternative caregiver is not utilized for the family. The SLED check is the only background check completed on the alternative caregiver, but the central registry and sexual offender should have also been checked.
18. Health Inspection completed in 1998 identified hazardous risks to child that were not addressed to include no updated Health Inspection.

19. There is no 1513 found completed in the record to match the current license.

Results for Section Three are displayed in Table 11. Deficiencies were noted in eight of the ten files reviewed. Deficiencies noted in Section Three may not invalidate the license, but still require attention and correction by county management. Several issues were identified by the reviewers, including:

1. Some homes were not visited quarterly as required by policy.
2. At times, all adult household members were either not seen quarterly as required by policy, or there was no way to reveal whether this occurred or not in dictation.
3. No supervisory review was noted prior to the issuance of the license.
4. The QHV guide was completed, but there was no summary of the visits addressing specific licensing issues in CAPSS.

Table 11. Foster Care License Section Three - Other Standard Licensing and Practice Issues

	Yes	No	NA	Total
A. Home visits documented in CAPSS?	7	2	0	9
A.1. Adult household members visited?	5	5	0	10
B. CAPSS consistent with 1513?	8	2	0	10
C. Licensing issues addressed during each quarterly visit documented in CAPSS?	7	1	1	9
D. Supervisory Review conducted?	8	2	0	10
E. Discussion of safety guidelines regarding access to in-ground swimming pools documented in CAPSS?	0	0	10	10
F. Background checks completed on alternative caregivers?	0	1	9	10

SECTION III: CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICE SCREEN-OUT REVIEW

A review of ten screened-out allegations was completed to determine whether the reports were appropriately screened out. The reports were randomly selected from the list of reports screened out by the county during the period under review. The *Screened-Out CPS Referral Review Instrument* was used to conduct the review. This instrument includes a description of the allegation and three questions:

- In the first question, the reviewer rates the appropriateness of the screen-out using a rating of *yes, no, or cannot determine*.
- In the second question, the reviewer considers whether the necessary collaterals were contacted using a rating of *yes, no, or not applicable*.
- In the third question, the reviewer considers whether appropriate referrals were made using a rating of *yes, no, or not applicable*.

Yes answers are considered strengths, *no* answers are considered area needing improvement (ANI), and *N/A* answers are considered not applicable.

The percentage of strengths is also calculated for each question. This percentage is calculated by adding the number of strengths and the number of ANIs. The number of strengths is divided into this total to determine the *percentage of strengths*. Findings of these reviews are noted in Table 12.

Table 12. Summary of Ratings for Screen-Outs Review

Rating	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
Strength	8(80%)	3(30%)	2(20%)
Area Needing Improvement	2(20%)	1(10%)	0(0%)
Not Applicable	0(0%)	6(60%)	8(80%)
Total	10(100%)	10(100%)	10(100%)
% Strengths	80%	75%	100%

SECTION IV: CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES UNFOUNDED REPORTS REVIEW

Five unfounded reports were reviewed to determine whether the reports were appropriately unfounded. The five unfounded reports were randomly selected from the list of all reports unfounded by the county during the period under review. The review was conducted using the *Child Welfare Services Review Instrument for Unfounded Reports*. This instrument includes a description of the allegation, the risk level assigned to the case at Intake, and three questions:

- In the first question, the reviewer assesses whether the investigation was initiated in a timely manner using a rating of *yes* or *no*.
- In the second question, the reviewer assesses whether an adequate assessment was conducted using a rating of *yes* or *no*.
- In the third question, the reviewer assesses whether the decision to unfound was appropriate using a rating of *yes* or *no*.

Questions rated as *Yes* on the assessment are considered strengths and those rated as *No* are considered ANI.

The percentage of strengths is also calculated for each question. This percentage is calculated by adding the number of strengths and the number of ANIs. The number of strengths is divided into this total to determine the percentage of strengths. Findings of these reviews are noted in Table 13.

Table 13. Summary of Ratings for Unfounded Reports Review

Rating	Question1	Question 2	Question 3
Strength	4(80%)	5(100%)	5(100%)
Area Needing Improvement	1(20%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Total	5(100%)	5(100%)	5(100%)
% Strengths	80%	100%	100%