

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

This report describes the results of the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) Florence County Quality Assurance Review, conducted November 4-7, 2013.

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 family preservation 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>	78% (7)	22% (2)	0% (0)
Safety 2 <i>Children are Safely Maintained in their Homes whenever Possible and Appropriate</i>	45% (9)	20% (4)	35% (7)
Permanency 1 <i>Children have Permanency and Stability in their Living Situations</i>	60% (6)	30% (3)	10% (1)
Permanency 2 <i>The Continuity of Family Relationships and Connections is Preserved for Children</i>	30% (3)	70% (7)	0% (0)
Well-Being 1 <i>Families have Enhanced Capacity to Provide for their Children’s Needs</i>	30% (6)	40% (8)	30% (6)
Well-Being 2 <i>Children receive Appropriate Services to meet their Educational Needs</i>	45% (4)	22% (2)	33% (3)
Well-Being 3 <i>Children receive Adequate Services to meet their Physical and Mental Health Needs</i>	33% (6)	22% (4)	45% (8)

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 family preservation cases.

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
<i>Strength</i>	40% (8)	40% (8)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	5% (1)	5% (1)
<i>Not Applicable</i>	55% (11)	55% (11)
Total	100% (20)	100% (20)
<i>% Strengths</i>	88.9% (8)	88.9% (8)

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
<i>Strength</i>	35% (7)	50% (10)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	40% (8)	50% (10)
<i>Not Applicable</i>	25% (5)	0% (0)
Total	100% (20)	100% (20)
<i>% Strengths</i>	46.7% (7)	50% (10)

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
<i>Strength</i>	15% (3)	35% (7)	30% (6)	30% (6)	0% (0)	5% (1)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	0% (0)	15% (3)	20% (4)	5% (1)	10% (2)	0% (0)
Not Applicable	85% (17)	50% (10)	50% (10)	65% (13)	90% (18)	95% (19)
Total	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)
<i>% Strengths</i>	100% (3)	70% (7)	60% (6)	85.7% (6)	0% (0)	100% (1)

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	35% (7)	30% (6)	5% (1)	30% (6)	30% (6)	10% (2)
Area needing improvement	5% (1)	5% (1)	40% (8)	20% (4)	20% (4)	35% (7)
Not Applicable	60% (12)	65% (13)	55% (11)	50% (10)	50% (10)	55% (11)
Total	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)
% Strengths	87.5% (7)	85.7% (6)	11.1% (1)	60% (6)	60% (6)	22.2% (2)

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.

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.

Table 6.

Rating	Item 17	Item 18	Item 19	Item 20
Strength	40% (8)	30% (6)	60% (12)	10% (2)
Area needing improvement	60% (12)	65% (13)	40% (8)	80% (16)
Not Applicable	0% (0)	5% (1)	0% (0)	10% (2)
Total	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)
% Strengths	40% (8)	31.6% (6)	60% (12)	11.1% (2)

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	20% (4)
Area needing improvement	25% (5)
Not Applicable	55% (11)
Total	100% (20)
% Strengths	44.4% (4)

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.

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).

Table 8.

Rating	Item 22	Item 23
<i>Strength</i>	30% (6)	30% (6)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	45% (9)	35% (7)
Not Applicable	25% (5)	35% (7)
Total	100% (20)	100% (20)
<i>% Strengths</i>	40% (6)	46.2% (6)

SUMMARY

Several positives were found with the cases. *Items* 5 and 10 were identified as *strengths* of the agency; all of the cases reviewed were rated as *strengths* with no *area needing improvement* (ANI). This means that for the cases reviewed, children who entered foster care during the period under review did not re-enter within 12 months of a prior foster care episode (5), and the agency made concerted efforts to adequately prepare children to transition from foster care to independent living (10). Additionally, one family preservation case had only two applicable items rated as ANI.

Reviewers identified several concerns. One family preservation case did not have any *items* rated as *strength*, while another three family preservation cases had only one *item* rated as *strength*. *Item* 9 had had all applicable cases rated as ANI. *Item* 13 had eight of nine applicable cases rated as ANI, *Item* 18 had 13 of 19 applicable cases rated as ANI, *Item* 16 had seven of nine applicable cases rated as ANI, and *Item* 20 had 16 of 18 applicable cases rated as ANI.

SECTION II: FOSTER CARE LICENSE REVIEW

As part of the Quality Assurance Review Process in Florence County, ten Foster Home Licenses were randomly selected from the list of all licenses issued for the county during the period under review. These licenses were reviewed using the *South Carolina Department of Social Services Quality Assurance 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
- 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 documents and CAPPs

Section Two review criteria include the following *items*:

- a review of the initial background checks
- 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
- 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.

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 are noted in Table 9.

Section One. Three foster care issuances for initial/standard licenses were reviewed. Two of the cases reviewed were rated as *strength* because all of the licensing requirements were met prior to authorization of the license renewal. Issues identified in Section Two that led to the rating of *ANI* for one case include:

Medical Records:

- Medical records in the file were not up-to-date.

Section Two. One of the seven cases reviewed was rated as *strength* because all of the licensing requirements were met prior to authorization of the license renewal. Issues identified in Section Two that led to the rating of *ANI* for six cases include:

Table 9. Summary of Ratings for Sections One and Two

Rating	Section One: Initial	Section Two: Renewal
<i>Strength</i>	2 (66.7%)	1 (14.3%)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	1 (33.3%)	6 (85.7%)
Total	3 (100%)	7 (100%)
% <i>Strengths</i>	2 (66.7%)	1 (14.3%)

Background Checks:

- Central registry, SLED, and/or sex offender registry checks were not completed for all appropriate individuals.

Firearms:

- A file did not contain verification that ammunition was stored in a locked, separate location from the firearms.

Fire Inspections:

- An up-to-date fire inspection was not in the file.

Training:

- Only 24 hours of training could be verified for each foster parent in one family. The parents had completed 16 hours of online training during the re-licensure period, and only eight online hours can be used toward the 24 hour total.

Section Three. Deficiencies were noted for eight of ten files reviewed. Deficiencies noted in Section Three may not invalidate the license but still require attention and correction by county management. Issues identified by the reviewers include:

Alternative Caregivers:

- Alternative caregivers/baby sitters were not identified.

Documentation:

- The file did not contain the Child Factor Checklist.
- The foster parent application in the file was not updated.
- A Disaster Preparedness Plans was not located in the file or was not signed.
- The file did not contain a current family autobiography.
- The file did not contain current references for all household members.
- The previous license for the foster home had expired, and the home remained close for one year. Updated initial licensing documentation was needed.
- Documentation for the household composition was unclear.

Safety:

- The number of children in the household exceeded the number for which the foster parents were licensed.
- A discipline statement was not located in the file or was not signed.

Fire Drills:

- Records did not include verification that fire drills were conducted regularly.

Quarterly Home Visits:

- Quarterly home visit guides were not located in the file.

SECTION III: CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICE SCREEN-OUT REVIEW

A review of ten screened-out allegations was completed to determine whether the reports were screened out according to agency policy. The reports were randomly selected from the list of reports screened out by the county during the period under review. The *South Carolina Department of Social Services Quality Assurance Review Screen-Out Report Instrument* was used to conduct the review. This instrument includes a description of the allegation and seven questions regarding the screened-out decisions and processes (see Table 10).

Table 10. Summary of Item Ratings for Screen-Out Review

	Yes	No	NA	Total
1. Illegal substance use alleged AND reason for safety threatened with harm	1	9	0	10
2. Use of CAPSS and/or other systems for prior involvement	8	2	0	10
3. Maltreatment tab in CAPSS completed	10	0	0	10
4. Contact with necessary collaterals prior to screen-out decision	3	2	5	10
5. Another intake referral on same perpetrator and/or child within 12 months	0	10	0	10
6. Intake Supervisor ensured consultation with another supervisory-level authority	0	0	10	10

*Note: A single case may have more than one issue identified.

The percentage of *strengths* is also calculated for the cases reviewed. 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 11.

Table 11. Summary of Ratings for Screen-Outs Review

Rating	Was this case screened-out according to agency policy?
<i>Strength</i>	7 (70%)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	3 (30%)
Total	10 (100%)
<i>% Strengths</i>	7 (70%)

Three cases were determined to be screened-out in violation of agency policy. Issues identified that led to the rating of *ANI* include:

- The agency did not conduct a thorough research of CAPSS.
- The agency did not make all appropriate collateral contacts.
- The intake tab in CAPSS indicated all systems were unavailable, but there is no documentation to demonstrate that additional attempts were made by the agency to access CAPSS and other agency systems prior to screening out the report.
- The agency did not document concerted efforts to locate the family. Due to allegations of domestic violence, drug use, and risk of harm to the children, it was reasonable to expect that the agency would have made concerted efforts to locate the family prior to screening out the report.
- The names of collateral contacts were not documented, and therefore could not be confirmed.

SECTION IV: CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES UNFOUNDED REPORTS REVIEW

Five unfounded reports were reviewed to determine whether the reports were unfounded in accordance with agency policy. The five unfounded reports were randomly selected from the list of all reports unfounded by the county during the period under review. *It should be noted that several cases in the list of unfounded reports had been ongoing for more than four months when an investigation is to be completed in 45 days (or 60 days with a 15 day extension based on approval by the director).* The review was conducted using the *South Carolina Department of Social Services Quality Assurance Review Unfounded Report Instrument*. This instrument includes a description of the allegation and items regarding three primary areas (see Table 12):

- Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment,
- Repeat maltreatment, and
- Risk assessment and safety management.

Table 12. Summary of Item Ratings for Unfounded Review

	Yes	No	N/A	Total
1A. Investigation not initiated in accordance with timeframes and requirements	1	4	0	5
1B. Face-to-face contact not made in accordance with timeframes and requirements	1	4	0	5
1C. Delays in investigation initiation or face-to-face contact beyond control of agency	0	1	4	5
2A. At least one substantiated or indicated maltreatment report	0	5	0	5
2B. One substantiated or indicated maltreatment report within six months before or after	0	0	5	5
2C. Repeat maltreatment involving the same or similar circumstances	0	0	5	5
3A. Initial assessment of risk to the children and family in the home	3	0	2	5
3B. Initial assessment initiated in accordance with established timeframes	3	1	1	5
3C. Ongoing assessment(s) of risk to the children and family in the home	3	2	0	5
3D. Safety concerns that were not adequately or appropriately addressed by the agency	4	1	0	5

*Note: A single case may have more than one issue identified.

The percentage of *strengths* is calculated for each decision to unfound. 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 Review

Rating	Were cases unfounded according to agency policy?
<i>Strength</i>	1 (20%)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	4 (80%)
Total	5 (100%)
<i>% Strengths</i>	1 (20%)

Reasons that four unfounded cases reviewed violated agency policy include:

- The agency received a report but failed to conduct any investigation. The report was administratively closed as Unfounded Category-II approximately seven months after the report was received because neither the case worker nor the supervisor were with the agency and could therefore not provide any information. There is no documentation aside from the initial report that was received.
- The decision to unfound the report was inappropriate because there were safety concerns in the home which were not adequately addressed. Children were reported to have bruises and pictures were taken. Neither the pictures documenting the bruises nor the safety plan put in place with the family were located in the case file. The caregiver

admitted to spanking only one of the children. Concerns included that the children were left alone with the guardian (perpetrator) even though the guardian had anger issues and, according to the daycare, the children ate as if they were starving. Follow-up on concerns was insufficient. The case was only extended 15 days and closed without offering any safety services.

- The child reported to the agency that his cousin hit him in the face, and showed all of his marks and bruises to the agency. The agency failed to check with law enforcement to verify that a forensic interview/medical examination had been scheduled for the child. Documentation does not support that the agency scheduled this appointment. There were no ongoing assessments or interviews of the paternal grandparents and cousins of the victim child. The agency was aware that the grandfather and cousins resided in the same home.
- The agency failed to adequately address safety concerns in the home pertaining to the minor child. Those concerns which warranted agency involvement included criminal domestic violence, drug abuse by the father, and threat of harm of sexual abuse by the father. The agency failed to conduct a diligent search on the father in order to conduct an interview. The agency failed to complete any of the directed supervisory recommendations regarding follow-up with the father including meeting and interviewing the father, requesting a drug screen from the father, and researching the father's criminal history and status in the national sex offender registry. Only a local law enforcement check using the mother's address was completed. Additional concerns related to the mother. Documentation failed to verify the mother's compliance with medication to manage mental health concerns. The agency did not make appropriate collateral contact with the local mental health center, failed to discuss this concern with the mother, and did not follow through with a drug screen request.