

Region II Adoptions – Columbia Office
Child Welfare Services Review
March 2009

During the week of March 2-6, 2009, a team of DSS staff from adoption regional offices and state office conducted an onsite review of child welfare services in the Region II Adoptions office. A sample of open and closed cases was reviewed.

Period under Review: March 1, 2008 to February 28, 2009

Purpose

The Department of Social Services engages in a review of child welfare services in each county and in each regional adoption office to:

- a) Determine to what degree services are delivered in compliance with federal and state laws and agency policy; and
- b) Assess the outcomes for children and families engaged in the child welfare system.

State law (§43-1-115) states, in part:

The state department shall conduct, at least once every five years, a substantive quality review of the child protective services and foster care programs in each county and each adoption office in the State. The county's performance must be assessed with reference to specific outcome measures published in advance by the department.

The information obtained by the child welfare services review process will:

- a) Give county and regional staff feedback on the effectiveness of their interventions.
- b) Direct state office technical assistance staff to assist county and regional staff with their areas needing improvement.
- c) Inform agency administrators of which systemic factors impair county and regional staffs' ability to achieve specific outcomes.
- d) Direct training staff to provide training for county and regional staff specific to their needs.

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Sources

The county and regional office-specific review of child welfare services is both quantitative and qualitative.

The review is **quantitative** because it begins with an analysis of every child welfare outcome report for that office for the period under review. The outcome reports reflect the performance of the office in all areas of the child welfare program.

The review is **qualitative** because it assesses the quality of the services rendered and the effectiveness of those services. The review seeks to explain why an office's performance data looks the way it does.

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Ratings

The standard that must be met for all items reviewed onsite is 95%. Each outcome report has its own standard. To be rated an area of **Strength** most items must meet both the qualitative onsite review standard **and** the quantitative outcome report standard.

Cases Included in Review	
Case Management	15
Assessment	10
Total Cases Reviewed	25

Active Human Service Cases	
Full Cases Management	76
ICPC	28
Post Legal	41
Shared Case Management	413
Assessments	78
Total Cases	636

Human Service Staff	Authorized Positions	Filled Positions	Vacant Positions	Extended Leave
Area Administrator	1	1	0	0
Supervisors	5	5	0	0
Adoption Specialists	32	32	0	0

NOTE: In that this is an evaluation of the performance of a regional adoptions office, ratings are based on the actions that occurred from the time the adoptions office assumed case management.

Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

The office’s performance on this outcome is based on the rating of two items:

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1) Repeat Maltreatment | Area Needing Improvement |
| 2) Risk of Harm | Strength |

Onsite Review Findings						
Safety Item 1: Repeat Maltreatment						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	13	87	2	15	0	0

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Explanation of Item 1: Repeat Maltreatment

This is an **Area Needing Improvement** for Region II Adoptions. This item measures the occurrence of maltreatment among children under agency supervision. In two of the 15 cases reviewed the children involved experienced repeat maltreatment during the period under review. The agency’s response was appropriate in both instances.

<u>Onsite Review Findings</u>						
Safety Item 4: Risk of Harm						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	15	100	0	0	0	0

Explanation of Item 2: Risk of Harm

This is an area of **Strength** for Region II Adoptions. This item assesses whether the agency’s interventions reduced risks of harm to children. In every case the agency’s oversight of the children was sufficient to ensure children’s safety. When threats to a child’s safety became known the agency acted decisively to reduce or remove those threats.

Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

The office’s performance on this outcome is based on the rating of four items:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 3) Stability of foster care placement | Strength |
| 4) Permanency goal and concurrent planning | Area Needing Improvement |
| 5) Adoption | Area Needing Improvement |
| 6) Recruitment | Area Needing Improvement |

<u>Onsite Review Findings</u>						
Permanency Item 3: Stability						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	14	93	1	7	0	0

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Explanation of Item 3: Stability of Foster Care Placement

This is an area of **Strength** for Region II Adoptions. This item measures the frequency of placement changes for children in foster care, and assesses the reasons for those changes. The only child reviewed who experienced more than two placements during the period under review moved from one home into a pre-adoptive home. That parent decided not to go through with the adoption. The child was then moved into a third home. All other children within the review sample had stable placements.

<u>Onsite Review Findings</u>						
Permanency Item 4: Permanency Goal and Concurrent Planning						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	10	67	5	33	0	0

Explanation of Item 4: Permanency Goal and Concurrent Planning

This is an **Area Needing Improvement** for Region II Adoptions. This item evaluates the appropriateness of permanency goals for children in foster care and the timeliness of those permanency decisions. Reviewers found that in 33% of the cases the agency failed to do concurrent planning when it was apparent that the prognosis for adoption was poor. In some instances a concurrent plan of “Placement with a Relative” would have been an appropriate concurrent plan. In most cases, “APPLA” should have become either the primary or concurrent plan for the child.

<u>Onsite Review Findings</u>						
Permanency Item 5: Adoption						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	3	20	12	80	0	0

Explanation of Item 5: Adoption

This is an **Area Needing Improvement** for Region II Adoptions. This item evaluates the process within the child welfare system to achieve timely adoptions for children in foster care. None of the cases reviewed had completed adoptions within 24 months of entering foster care, reviewers did not factor delays that occurred prior to the office assuming case management into their ratings. Reviewers saw three dominant trends that caused delays in permanency for the children.

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1. The children’s special medical and behavioral needs caused pre-adoptive parents to want the agency’s continued support, and made them reluctant to complete their adoptions.
2. Children who entered care from birth and were immediately case managed by the Adoptions unit did not receive the quick TPR’s that their cases warranted. In some instances the agency waited for relinquishments from parents instead of terminating their rights.
3. The office is managing children with the plan of Adoptions whose primary plan should be “APPLA”.

Reviewers also noted that adoptive home studies were often completed on prospective parents within two months.

Onsite Review Findings						
Permanency Item 6: Recruitment						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	3	20	12	80	0	0

Explanation of Item 6: Recruitment

This is an **Area Needing Improvement** for Region II Adoptions. This item evaluates the agency’s recruitment efforts on behalf of children with the plan of adoption. Only 25% of the cases reviewed received a favorable rating for recruitment activities. Two main areas needing improvement were identified:

1. No recruitment was being done for children in the home of a foster parent that the agency considered to be a possible adoptive resource, even though the foster parent had not signed a pre-adoptive agreement.
2. Recruitment activities are often not documented in the case record.

Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

The office’s performance on this outcome is based on the rating of four items:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 7) Placement with siblings in foster care/adoptive setting | Strength |
| 8) Relationship of child in care with siblings | Area Needing Improvement |
| 9) Preserving connections | Area Needing Improvement |
| 10) Relative placement | Area Needing Improvement |

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<u>Onsite Review Findings</u>						
Permanency Item 7: Placement with Siblings in Foster Care/Adoptive Setting						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	3	100	0	0	12	0

Explanation of Item 7: Placement with Siblings in Foster Care/Adoptive Setting

This is an area of **Strength** for Region II Adoptions. This item evaluates the agency's efforts to keep siblings together when it is appropriate to do so. Reviewers noted that in many cases, the children either had no siblings or had half siblings in other families with whom they had never had a relationship. Whenever appropriate, children were placed with their siblings.

<u>Onsite Review Findings</u>						
Permanency Item 8: Relationship of Child in Care with Siblings						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	4	67	2	33	9	0

Explanation of Item 8: Relationship of Child in Care with Siblings

This is an **Area Needing Improvement** for Region II Adoptions. This item evaluates the agency's efforts to maintain an emotionally supportive relationship between the child and his or her minor siblings in a different placement. In 67% of the cases reviewed the agency supported the relationship between separated siblings. However, in 33% of cases reviewed it did not. In those cases where the relationship between siblings was not supported workers documented the child's requests to see the sibling but failed to take steps to see to it that visits occurred.

<u>Onsite Review Findings</u>						
Permanency Item 9: Preserving Connections						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	2	25	6	75	7	0

Explanation of Item 9: Preserving Connections

This is an **Area Needing Improvement** for Region II Adoptions. This item evaluates the agency's efforts to preserve children's connections to the people, places and things that are

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important to them. However, this did not occur in 75% of the cases reviewed. It was often left up to the foster or adoptive parent to help children maintain important connections. Because the issue usually was not addressed in the record, reviewers could not determine when or if caregivers were attending to this need of the children in their care.

Some adoption staff expressed a reluctance to help children maintain connections to biological family members for fear that such connections would impair the child’s ability to become part of an adoptive family.

Onsite Review Findings						
Permanency Item 10: Relative Placement						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	4	44	5	56	6	0

Explanation of Item 10: Relative placement

This is an **Area Needing Improvement** for Region II Adoptions. This item evaluates the agency’s efforts to identify the child’s maternal and paternal relatives, and assess each as a potential placement for the child. In 44% of the records reviewed adoptions specialists completed home studies or background checks on relatives to assess their ability to parent the child in care. However, in 56% of the cases reviewed no such assessments occurred because the adoption specialists assumed that relatives should have been sought and assessed prior to the TPR. Consequently, the assessments were not done by the county or the adoptions office.

Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.

The office’s performance on this outcome is based on the rating of five items:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 11) Assessment of adoptive parents and service delivery | Area Needing Improvement |
| 12) Child involvement in case planning | Strength |
| 13) Adoptive parent involvement in case planning | Strength |
| 14) Worker visits with child | Area Needing Improvement |
| 15) Worker visits with adoptive parents | Area Needing Improvement |

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<u>Onsite Review Findings</u>						
Well Being Item 11: Assessment of Adoptive Parents and Service Delivery						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	8	89	1	11	6	0

Explanation of Item 11: Assessment of Adoptive Parents and Service Delivery

This is an **Area Needing Improvement** for Region II Adoptions. This item asks two questions: 1) Were the needs of the adoptive parent assessed, and 2) Did the agency take steps to meet the identified needs? With 89% of the cases reviewed receiving a Strength rating, this was generally a strong area for this adoptions office. The case that caused this to be an area needing improvement involved a South Carolina child with severe behavioral and psychiatric problems placed pre-adoptively in another state. The pre-adoptive mother was requesting an increased board rate to cover the cost of specialized care for the child. The adoptions specialists failed to submit the request for the increase.

<u>Onsite Review Findings</u>						
Well Being Item 12: Child Involvement in Case Planning						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	6	100	0	0	9	0

Explanation of Item 12: Child Involvement in Case Planning

This is an area of **Strength** for the Region II Adoptions. This item evaluates the agency's efforts to involve the child in the case planning process. In every case, age-appropriate children were involved in the case planning process. Their involvement was made evident in the dictation of the adoption specialist's monthly visits with the child or through correspondence.

<u>Onsite Review Findings</u>						
Well Being Item 13: Adoptive Parent Involvement in Case Planning						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	7	100	0	0	8	0

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Explanation of Item 13: Adoptive Parent Involvement in Case Planning

This is an area of **Strength** for Region II Adoptions. This item evaluates the agency’s efforts to involve adoptive parents in the case planning process. In every case, adoptive parents were involved in the case planning process. Their involvement was made evident in the dictation of the adoption specialist’s monthly visits or through correspondence.

<u>Onsite Review Findings</u>						
Well Being Item 14: Worker Visits with Child						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	13	87	2	13	0	0

Explanation of Item 14: Worker Visits with Child

This is an **Area Needing Improvement** for Region II Adoptions. This item measures the frequency of caseworker visits with the child, and evaluates the quality of those visits. Thirteen percent of the cases reviewed needed improvement because the adoption specialist documented her monthly contact with one brief sentence, e.g., “Worker made monthly face-to-face contact with child.” Those brief statements contained no information about what the caseworker did or observed during the visit with the child. This practice was done so that CAPSS reports would reflect that the child was seen, and to avoid exception reports.

<u>Onsite Review Findings</u>						
Well Being Item 15: Worker Visits with Adoptive Parents						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	5	71	2	29	8	0

Explanation of Item 15: Worker Visits with Adoptive Parents

This is an **Area Needing Improvement** for Region II Adoptions. This item measures the frequency of caseworker visits with parents, and evaluates the quality of those visits. Twenty nine percent of the cases reviewed needed improvement because the adoptions specialist documented her monthly contact with one brief sentence, e.g., “Worker made monthly face-to-face contact with parent.” The documentation of those monthly contacts contained no information about the issues that were addressed. This practice was done so that CAPSS reports would reflect that the child was seen, and to avoid exception reports.

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Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

The office’s performance on this outcome is based on the rating of one item:

16) Educational need of the child **Area Needing Improvement**

Onsite Review Findings						
Well Being Item 16: Educational Needs of the Child						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	11	73	4	27	0	0

Explanation of Item 16: Educational Needs of the Child

This is an **Area Needing Improvement** for Region II Adoptions. This item evaluates the agency’s ability to assess and address the educational needs of children under agency supervision. Reviewers found that adoption specialists usually gave consistent attention to the educational needs of the children. The main reason this area needs improvement is because in 27% of the cases reviewed workers relied on information from foster or pre-adoptive parents about the child’s performance in school without making direct contact with the school.

Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

The office’s performance on this outcome is based on the rating of two items:

17) Physical health of the child **Area Needing Improvement**

18) Mental health of the child **Area Needing Improvement**

Onsite Review Findings						
Well Being Item 17: Physical Health of the Child						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	8	53	7	47	0	0

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Explanation of Item 17: Physical Health of the Child

This is an **Area Needing Improvement** for Region II Adoptions. This item evaluates the agency’s ability to assess and meet the physical and dental health needs of children under agency supervision. The main reason this area needs improvement is because in 47% of the cases reviewed workers relied on information from foster or pre-adoptive parents about the child’s health without making direct contact with the medical provider. Those case files contained no up-dated medical records.

<u>Onsite Review Findings</u>						
Well Being Item 18: Mental Health of the Child						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Cases	9	75	3	25	3	0

Explanation of Item 18: Mental Health of the Child

This is an **Area Needing Improvement** for Region II Adoptions. This item evaluates the agency’s ability to assess and meet the mental health needs of children under agency supervision. The main reason this area needs improvement is because in 25% of the cases reviewed workers relied on information from foster or pre-adoptive parents about the child’s mental health without making direct contact with the mental health provider.

Adoption Assessments

	Yes	No
Was the assessment completed with 90 days of the referral?	4	5
Was the assessment adequate?	6	3
Was the decision appropriate?	5	4

Explanation of Item 19: Adoption Assessments

This is an **Area Needing Improvement** for Region II Adoptions. This item evaluates the agency’s process for assessing children for adoption services and determines if decisions were supported by the facts of the cases. Lack of documentation within some case files made it difficult to determine when referrals were initiated or completed. Assessments involving three children contained confusing information that needs clarification. Without that clarification it was difficult to justify the assessment decision.

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Region II Adoptions Summary Sheet				
Performance Item or Outcome		Performance Item Ratings		
		Strength	Area Needing Improvement	N/A*
Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.				
ANI	Item 1: Repeat maltreatment	13/15 = 87%	2/15 = 13%	0
Str	Item 2: Risk of harm	15/15 = 100%	0	0
Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.				
Str	Item 3: Stability of foster care/adoptive placement	14/15 = 93%	1/15 = 7%	0
ANI	Item 4: Permanency goal and concurrent planning	10/15 = 67%	5/15 = 33%	0
ANI	Item 5: Adoption	3/15 = 20%	12/15 = 80%	0
ANI	Item 6: Recruitment	2/8 = 25%	6/8 = 75%	7
Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.				
Str	Item 7: Placement with siblings in foster care/adoptive setting	3/3 = 100%		12
ANI	Item 8: Relationship of child in care with siblings	4/6 = 67%	2/6 = 33%	9
ANI	Item 9: Preserving connections	2/8 = 25%	6/8 = 75%	7
ANI	Item 10: Relative placement	4/9 = 44%	5/9 = 56%	6
Well Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.				
ANI	Item 11: Assessment of adoptive parents and service delivery	8/9 = 89%	1/9 = 11%	6
Str	Item 12: Child involvement in case planning	6/6 = 100%		9
Str	Item 13: Adoptive Parent involvement in case planning	7/7 = 100%		8
ANI	Item 14: Worker visits with child	13/15 = 87%	2/15 = 13%	0
ANI	Item 15: Worker visits with adoptive parents	5/7 = 71%	2/7 = 29%	8
Well Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.				
ANI	Item 16: Educational needs of the child	11/15 = 73%	4/15 = 27%	0
Well Being Outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.				
ANI	Item 17: Physical health of the child	8/15 = 53%	7/15 = 47%	0
ANI	Item 18: Mental health of the child	9/12 = 75%	3/12 = 25%	3
Adoption Assessments				
ANI	Item 19: Adoption Assessments	5/9 = 56%	4/9 = 44%	0

The objective is that 95% of the cases receive a “strength” rating.

Str = Strength

ANI = Area Needing Improvement

* = Rating based on agency data rather than file review