

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

This report describes the results of the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) Darlington County Quality Assurance Review, conducted September 9-13, 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>	89% (8)	11% (1)	0% (0)
Safety 2 <i>Children are Safely Maintained in their Homes whenever Possible and Appropriate</i>	45% (9)	30% (6)	25% (5)
Permanency 1 <i>Children have Permanency and Stability in their Living Situations</i>	40% (4)	60% (6)	0% (0)
Permanency 2 <i>The Continuity of Family Relationships and Connections is Preserved for Children</i>	40% (4)	60% (6)	0% (0)
Well-Being 1 <i>Families have Enhanced Capacity to Provide for their Children's Needs</i>	35% (7)	60% (12)	5% (1)
Well-Being 2 <i>Children receive Appropriate Services to meet their Educational Needs</i>	86% (6)	14% (1)	0% (0)
Well-Being 3 <i>Children receive Adequate Services to meet their Physical and Mental Health Needs</i>	55% (10)	17% (3)	28% (5)

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)	45% (9)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	5% (1)	0% (0)
<i>Not Applicable</i>	55% (11)	55% (11)
Total	100% (20)	100% (20)
<i>% Strengths</i>	88.9% (8)	100% (9)

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>	40% (8)	50% (10)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	30% (6)	50% (10)
<i>Not Applicable</i>	30% (6)	0% (0)
Total	100% (20)	100% (20)
<i>% Strengths</i>	57.1% (8)	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
Strength	10% (2)	30% (6)	40% (8)	15% (3)	0% (0)	15% (3)
Area needing improvement	0% (0)	20% (4)	10% (2)	10% (2)	20% (4)	0% (0)
Not Applicable	90% (18)	50% (10)	50% (10)	75% (15)	80% (16)	85% (17)
Total	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)
% Strengths	100% (2)	60% (6)	80% (8)	60% (3)	0% (0)	100% (3)

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)	30% (6)	35% (7)	25% (5)	15% (3)
Area needing improvement	10% (2)	10% (2)	15% (3)	15% (3)	25% (5)	30% (6)
Not Applicable	55% (11)	60% (12)	55% (11)	50% (10)	50% (10)	55% (11)
Total	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)
% Strengths	77.8% (7)	75% (6)	66.7% (6)	70% (7)	50% (5)	33.3% (3)

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	45% (9)	45% (9)	80% (16)	15% (3)
Area needing improvement	55% (11)	50% (10)	20% (4)	65% (13)
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)	80% (16)	18.8% (3)

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	5% (1)
Not Applicable	65% (13)
Total	100% (20)
% Strengths	85.7% (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.

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>	50% (10)	30% (6)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	30% (6)	10% (2)
Not Applicable	20% (4)	60% (12)
Total	100% (20)	100% (20)
<i>% Strengths</i>	62.5% (10)	75% (6)

SUMMARY

Several positives were found with the cases. *Items 2, 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 in the family did not experience repeat maltreatment within a 6-month period (2); 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 efforts to ensure that youth with a permanency goal of APPLA were adequately prepared to transition (10). Additionally, one foster care and one family preservation case had only one applicable *item* rated as ANI. Another three foster care cases had only two applicable *items* rated as ANI.

Reviewers identified several concerns. One family preservation case had only one *item* rated as *strength*, while another family preservation case only had two *items* rated as *strengths*. *Item 9* had all applicable cases rated as ANI and *Item 16* had six of nine applicable cases rated as ANI. *Item 20* had thirteen of sixteen applicable cases rated as ANI.

SECTION II: FOSTER CARE LICENSE REVIEW

As part of the Quality Assurance Review Process in Darlington County, nine 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 *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. None of the cases reviewed were rated as *strength* because all of the licensing requirements were not met prior to authorization of the license renewal. Issues identified in Section Two that led to the rating of *ANI* for all three cases include:

Background Checks:

- FBI checks were not completed.
- Background checks were not completed for alternative caregivers or were not in the file.

Documentation:

- A foster home was reopened after being closed for two years, and an up-to-date DHEC inspection was not obtained prior to licensure.

Pet Vaccination Records:

- Up-to-date pet vaccinations were not completed prior to licensure or were not on record.

Section Two. None of the seven cases reviewed were rated as *strength* because not 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 all seven cases include:

Table 9. Summary of Ratings for Sections One and Two

Rating	Section One: Initial	Section Two: Renewal
<i>Strength</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	3 (100%)	7 (100%)
Total	3 (100%)	7 (100%)
<i>% Strengths</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Background Checks:

- Central registry, SLED, sex offender registry checks, and/or FBI checks were not completed, completed improperly, or not up-to-date.
- Background checks were not completed for alternative caregivers or were not in the file.

Medical:

- Medical records were not in the case file for all adults in the home.

Safety:

- An annual Re-assessment Study could not be located for the renewal of the license.

Section Three. Deficiencies were noted for all 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:

- An alternative caregiver was not identified.
- A babysitter was named, but no alternative caregiver form was completed by the family to be filed in the licensing record.

Fire Drills:

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

Documentation:

- The file did not contain current reference checks for the foster mother.
- There was a discrepancy in information regarding household members.
- A foster parent failed to disclose her marriage of eight years and was therefore requested to voluntarily close her home.
- The agency discovered that a foster parent was not providing full-time care for a child while receiving an adoption subsidy.

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).

The following criteria must be met in order for the case to be rated a *strength*:

- Question 1 was *No* and the answers to 2-6 were *Yes* (or *N/A*)

The following criteria must be met in order for the case to be rated as *area needing improvement*:

- Question 1 was *Yes*, or
- Question 1 was *No* and the answers to any of 2-6 were *No* (or *N/A*)

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	0	10	0	10
2. Use of CAPSS and/or other systems for prior involvement	10	0	0	10
3. Maltreatment tab in CAPSS completed	3	7	0	10
4. Contact with necessary collaterals prior to screen-out decision	1	3	6	10
5. Another intake referral on same perpetrator and/or child within 12 months	2	8	0	10
6. Intake Supervisor ensured consultation with another supervisory-level authority	0	2	8	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>	2 (20%)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	8 (80%)
Total	10 (100%)
<i>% Strengths</i>	2 (20%)

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

- The Maltreatment tab in CAPPSS was not thoroughly completed and no explanation was provided.
- The agency did not make contact with all relevant collateral contacts.
- There was no documentation to indicate that a supervisor consulted with another supervisory-level individual, when appropriate, prior to making the decision to screen out.
- The agency did not provide a rationale for screening out the case even though the father was on the central registry and had allegations of prior physical and substance abuse.

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. 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.

The decision to unfound would be a *strength* if the following applies:

- Question 2A is *No* and 2B and 2C are *N/A*; or
- Question 2A is *Yes* and 2B is *No* or *N/A* and 2C is *No* or *N/A*; or
- Question 2A is *Yes* and 2B is *Yes* and 2C is *No*; or
- Question 3A and 3B are *Yes* or *N/A* and 3C is *No* or *N/A*

The decision to unfound would be an *area needing improvement* if the following applies:

- Question 2A, 2B and 2C are *Yes*; or
- Question 3A or 3B is *No* or 3C is *No* or *N/A*

Table 12. Summary of Item Ratings for Unfounded Review

	Yes	No	N/A	Total
1A. Investigation not initiated in accordance with timeframes and requirements	0	5	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	1	4	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	4	1	0	5
3B. Ongoing assessment(s) of risk to the children and family in the home	2	3	0	5
3C. Safety concerns that were not adequately or appropriately addressed by the agency	2	2	1	5

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

The percentage of *strengths* is also 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 unfounded cases reviewed violated agency policy include:

- The agency failed to conduct ongoing assessments of the risk to the children in the family home. The only documented face-to-face contact with the father and children occurred on the same day the case was opened. The children were placed with alternative caregivers during the week that the case was open, but there was no risk and safety assessment of the children prior to case closure once they were returned home.
- On the date of intake, the agency allowed the child to stay with a neighbor overnight after the neighbor informed the agency that her husband, who resides in the home, had a history of drug use. No risk and safety assessment was conducted with the neighbor's husband. The agency failed to perform a sex offender's check after being informed that the mother's paramour, who resided in the home with the children and mother, was possibly a registered sex offender. The agency failed to have the child medically assessed follow the allegation of physical abuse and the child's disclosure that physical abuse was perpetrated by the mother.
- Time of contact was not documented and, therefore, it cannot be verified that the agency made contact within the specified timeframe. The agency only went to the home for the initial assessment, on the day of case closure, and failed to conduct a monthly assessment. No face-to-face contact was made with the youngest child prior to case closure.
- The agency failed to conduct initial and ongoing assessments on the step-brother, step-father, and other adults in the home. The agency did not complete drug screens on all applicable adults involved with the case. The victim child was not referred for a medical or forensic interview and a referral to the Child Advocacy Center was not made within five days. There is no documentation to support that the agency followed up with law enforcement regarding the referral for the victim child or the pending drug-related charges for the mother.