

**Cherokee County DSS
Child Welfare Services Review
January 2005**

A team of DSS staff from state office and surrounding counties conducted an on-site review of child welfare services in Cherokee County. A sample of open and closed foster care and treatment cases were reviewed. Also reviewed were screened-out intakes, foster home licensing records, and unfounded investigations. Stakeholders interviewed for this review included foster parents, Cherokee DSS staff, and representatives from the schools, Foster Care Review Board, Mental Health, and Guardian Ad Litem.

Period included in Case Record Review: July 1, 2004 to Dec 31, 2004

Period included in Outcome Measures: Jan 1, 2004 to Dec 31, 2004

Purpose

The Department of Social Services engages in a review of child welfare services in each county 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 (sec 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 staff feedback on the effectiveness of their interventions.
- b) Direct state office technical assistance staff to assist county staff with their areas needing improvement.
- c) Inform agency administrators of which systemic factors impair county staff's ability to achieve specific outcomes.
- d) Direct training staff to provide training for county staff specific to their needs.

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Sources

The county-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 county for the period under review. The outcome reports reflect the performance of the county in all areas of the child welfare program: Child Protective Services (CPS) Intake, CPS Investigations, CPS In-Home Treatment, Foster Care, Managed Treatment Services (MTS), and Adoptions.

The review is **qualitative** because it includes an analysis of information obtained from agency clients, staff and stakeholders. Client and stakeholder information was obtained by interviews. The questions posed to clients and stakeholders are designed to illicit information about the quality of the services rendered and the effectiveness of those services.

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Section One

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

<u>Summary of Findings</u>	Overall Finding: Substantially Achieved
-Safety Item 1: Timeliness of initiating investigations.	Finding: Strength
-Safety Item 2: Repeat maltreatment.	Finding: Strength

Analysis of Safety Item 1 Findings

<u>Strategic Outcome Report Findings</u>				
Measure S1.1: Timeliness of initiating investigations on reports of child maltreatment				
Data Time Period: 11/1/03 to 10/31/04				
	Number of Reports Accepted	Number of Investigations Initiated Timely	Number of Investigations Objective $\geq 99.99\%^*$	Number of Investigations Above (Below) Objective
State	15,623	14,678	15,621.44	(943.44)
Cherokee	452	451	451.95	(0.95)

* This standard is based on state law. It is not a federally established objective.

<u>Site Visit Findings</u> Performance Item Ratings						
Safety Item 1 : Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment.						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	3	100	0	0	7	0
Treatment	5	100	0	0	5	0
Total Cases	8	100	0	0	12	0

Explanation of Item 1

This is a strength for Cherokee DSS. State law requires that an investigation of all accepted reports of abuse and neglect be initiated within 24 hours. The outcome report above applies the 24-hour standard to all accepted reports. All but one out of 452 investigations was initiated within 24 hours. All of the cases reviewed onsite were initiated according to agency policy and state law.

Stakeholder interviews confirm that Cherokee DSS was very effective in initiating investigations in a timely manner. After hours calls to report abuse and neglect go

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directly to Law Enforcement. Law Enforcement calls the DSS on-call staff person. DSS staff have no difficulty getting Law Enforcement to accompany them to homes to initiate investigations.

Analysis of Safety Item 2 Findings

<u>Strategic Outcome Report Findings</u>				
Measure S1.2: Recurrence of Maltreatment – Of all children who were victims of indicated reports of child abuse and/or neglect during the reporting period, the percent having another indicated report within a subsequent 6 month period.				
Indicated Report Between July 1, 2003 and June 30, 2004				
	Number of Child Victims	Number of Child Victims In Another Founded Rept	Number of Children Objective <= 93.90%	Number of Children Above (Below) Objective
State	9,122	70	8,565.56	486.44
Cherokee	251	8	253.69	7.31

Note: This is a federally established objective.

<u>Site Visit Findings</u> Performance Item Ratings						
Safety Item 2 : Repeat Maltreatment.						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	10	100	0	0	0	0
Treatment	9	100	1	90	0	0
Total Cases	19	95	1	5	0	0

Explanation of Item 2

This is a Strength for Cherokee DSS. According to CAPSS data 8 of the 251 cases (3%) indicated for abuse or neglect during the period under review were victims in a previous founded report. Consequently, Cherokee DSS met the federally established standard for this item. Only 1 of the 20 cases reviewed onsite was a victim in a previously founded report.

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Section Two

Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Summary of Findings

Overall Finding: Not Achieved

-Safety Item 3: Services to prevent removal.

Finding: Area Needing Improvement

-Safety Item 4: Risk of harm to child (ren).

Finding: Area Needing Improvement

Analysis of Safety Item 3 Findings

<u>Site Visit Findings</u>		Performance Item Ratings					
Safety Item 3: Services to family to protect child (ren) in home and prevent removal.							
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable		
	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Foster Care	3	75	1	25	6	0	
Treatment	8	80	2	20		0	
Total Cases	11	79	3	21	6	0	

Item 3

This is an “Area Needing” for Cherokee County. This item assesses the appropriateness of the agency’s interventions to prevent the removal of children from their family. Reviewers rated 11 of the applicable 14 cases “strength” for this item. That is because, in 79% of the cases, services to protect children in the home were appropriately applied. However, to receive an overall rating of “Strength”, at least 90% of the cases must be rated “Strength”.

In three of the 14 applicable cases, the agency did not initiate services that addressed the risk factors to the children in the home. In one case involving a drug abusing single parent, who was not adequately supervising her four children under the age of 10, the only service was a safety plan in which the mother agreed not to use drugs. This led to the ex-parte removal of the children.

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Analysis of Safety Item 4 Findings

Site Visit Findings Performance Item Ratings						
Safety Item 4: Risk of harm.						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	9	90	1	10	0	0
Treatment	6	60	4	40	0	0
Total Cases	15	75	5	25	0	0

Strategic Outcome Report Findings				
Measure S2.2: Risk of harm to child – Of all unfounded investigations during the reporting period, the percent receiving subsequent reports within six months of the initial report.				
	Number Alleged Child Victims in an Unfounded Rept 07/01/03 to 06/30/04	Number With Another Rept Within 6 Months of Unfounded Determination	Number of Cases Met Objective <= 8.50%*	Number of Cases Above (Below) Objective
State	13,747	1,115	12,578.51	53.49
Cherokee	410	76	375.15	(41.15)

* This is a DSS established objective.

Explanation of “Risk of Harm” measure

This is an “Area Needing Improvement”. The standard for the outcome report in CAPSS is that no more than 8.5% of alleged child victims have another report within 6 months of determination. At 18.5% Cherokee DSS received the lowest rating of all DSS offices on this performance item.

The onsite reviewers determine how effective the county DSS office was at managing the risks of harm that necessitate continued involvement by DSS. By this criteria, 5 of the 20 cases reviewed were rated Area Needing Improvement. Four of those five cases were treatment cases. In those cases the problem appears to be an inadequate response on the part of DSS to risk factors that are clearly identified and documented. For example, one cases involved drug-abusing parents of three children in which the mother was being physically abused by the father. This couple did not comply with anything in the treatment plan, even after a Rule To Show Cause hearing. Throughout this process, the children remained in the home.

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Section Three

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

Summary of Findings

Overall Finding:

- Item 5: Foster care re-entries
- Item 6: Stability of foster care placemt.
- Item 7: Permanency goal for child
- Item 8: Reunification, plmt w/ relatives
- Item 9: Adoption
- Item 10: Perm goal of other planned arrangmt

Partially Achieved

- Finding: Strength**
- Finding: Strength**
- Finding: Strength**
- Findings: Strength**
- Findings: Area Needing Improvement**
- Findings: Strength**

Analysis of Safety Permanency Item 5 Findings

<u>Site Visit Findings</u> Performance Item Ratings						
Permanency Item 5: Foster care re-entries.						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	3	100	0	0	7	0

<u>Strategic Outcome Report Findings</u>				
Measure P3.1: Foster Care Re-entries – Of all children who entered care during the year under review, the percent that re-entered foster care Within 12 months of a prior foster care episode.				
	Number Children Entering Care 01/01/04 to 12/31/04	Number That Were Returned Home Within The Past 12 Months From Previous Fos Care Episode	Number of Children Objective >= 91.40%*	Number of Children Above (Below) Objective
State	3,179	253	2,905.61	20.39
Cherokee	64	2	58.50	3.50

* This is a federally established objective.

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Explanation

Foster Care Re-entries is a Strength for Cherokee DSS. According to CAPSS, two of the 64 children (3%) who entered care in Cherokee County during the period under review had been returned home in the prior 12 months. None of the cases reviewed onsite involved a child re-entering foster care.

Analysis of Safety Permanency Item 6 Findings

<u>Site Visit Findings</u> Performance Item Ratings						
Permanency Item 6: Stability of foster care placement.						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	10	100	0	0	0	0

Strategic Outcome Report Findings

Measure P3.2: **Stability of Foster Care Placement** – Of all children who have been in foster care less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal from home, the percent that had not more than 2 placement settings.

	Number of Children In Care Less Than 12 Months	Number of Children With No More Than 2 Placements	Number of Children Objective $\geq 86.70\%*$	Number of Children Above (Below) Objective
State	3,629	3,000	3,146.34	(146.34)
Cherokee	69	60	59.82	0.18

Note: This is a federally established objective.

Explanation

Stability of foster care placement is a “Strength”. The outcome report shows that 60 of the 69 children (87%) in care less than 12 month had no more than 2 foster care placements. This surpassed the standard of 86.7% by a slim .3% margin. Onsite reviewers rated all 10 cases reviewed as “Strength” for this item. Onsite reviewers not only counted the number of moves children in foster care experienced, but looked at the reasons for those moves. Reviewers found that children who changed placements changed either to receive treatment for emotional or behavioral disorders, or were moved closer to family members in preparation for returning home.

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Analysis of Safety Permanency Item 7 Findings

<u>Strategic Outcome Report Findings</u>				
Measure P3.5: Permanency Goal for Child – Of all children who have been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, the percent for which a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) petition has been filed.				
	Children in Care At Least 15 of Last 22 Months 11/03 –10/04	Number Children With TPR Complaint	Number of Children Objective ≥ 53.00%*	Number of Children Above (Below) Objective
State	3,677	1,938	1,948.81	(10.81)
Cherokee	57	38	30.21	7.79

* This is DSS established objective. The federal agency, Administration for Children & Families, gathers data on this measure, but has not established a numerical objective.

<u>Site Visit Findings</u> Performance Item Ratings						
Permanency Item 7: Permanency goal for children.						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	10	100	0	0	0	0

Explanation

This is a “Strength” for Cherokee DSS. The CAPSS report and the onsite reviewers consider related, but different information to rate this item. To meet the criteria established in the CAPSS report 53.00% or more of the children in care 15 of the most recent 22 months must have a TPR petition filed. In Cherokee DSS 66.67% (38/57) of the children in care 15 of the most recent 22 months had a TPR petition filed.

Onsite reviewers rated this item based on two criteria: 1) Was the permanency goal appropriately matched to the child’s need? and 2) Was the agency acting to cause the goal to be achieved timely? All of the cases reviewed onsite were rated “Strength” for this item. There was evidence that the foster care supervisor helped caseworkers quickly determine the most appropriate permanency goal for the children in their care.

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Analysis of Safety Permanency Item 8 Findings

<u>Strategic Outcome Report Findings</u>				
Measure P3.3: Length of Time to Achieve Reunification – Of all children who were reunified with their parents or caregiver, at the time of discharge from foster care, the percent reunified in less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal from home.				
	Number of Children Where Fos Care Services Closed. Last Plan Was Return Home 0/01/04–12/31/04	Number of Children In Care Less Than 12 Months	Number Of Children Objective >= 76.20%*	Number of Children Above (Below) Objective
State	2,044	1,672	1,557.53	114047
Cherokee	43	35	32.77	2.23

* This is a federally established objective.

<u>Site Visit Findings</u> Performance Item Ratings						
Permanency Item 8: Reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives.						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	6	100	0	0	4	0

Explanation

This is a “Strength” for Cherokee DSS. To meet this federally establish criteria at least 76.20% of the children returned to their parents from foster care must be returned within 12 months of their removal from home. In Cherokee County 81% of the children returned home within a year of removal.

Onsite reviewers determined if Reunification, Guardianship, or Permanent Placement with Relatives, was the appropriate plan and if good progress was being made toward accomplishing that plan within 12 months of entering care. All applicable cases were rated “Strength”.

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Analysis of Permanency Item 9 Findings

Strategic Outcome Report Findings

Measure P3.4: **Length of Time to Achieve Adoption** – Of all children who exited from foster care during the year under review to a finalized adoption, the percent that exited care in less than 24 months from the time of the latest removal from home.

	Number of Children With Finalized Adoption W/in Past 12 Months	Number of Children Where Adoption Was Finalized Within 24 Months of Entering Care	Number of Children Objective $\geq 32.00\%*$	Number of Children Above (Below) Objective
State	3643	63	109.76	(46.76)
Cherokee	5	1	1.60	(0.60)

Note: This is a federally established objective.

Site Visit Findings Performance Item Ratings

Permanency Item 9: Adoption.

	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	2	67	1	33	7	0

Explanation

This is a “Area Needing Improvement”. According to the outcome report one of the five adoptions completed during the period under review was completed within 24 months. The average months in care for children with a plan of adoption in Cherokee County is 25.74 months. This means that the DSS office must reduce the average length of time to achieve adoption by 2 months to meet the federally established objective.

The adoption case rated “Area Needing Improvement” was plagued by a host of problems. The TPR petition was filed in August of 2002, but TPR hearings were continued at least twice. The case was not referred to the DSS adoptions unit for assessment according to policy. The foster parent, who wants to adopt the child, has not been given the assistance needed to complete the lengthy adoptions application.

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Analysis of Permanency Item 10 Findings

<u>Strategic Outcome Report Findings</u>				
Measure P3.6: Permanency Goal of “Other Planned Living Arrangement” – Of all children in foster care, the percent with a permanency goal of emancipation (Indep Liv Services) or a planned permanent living arrangement other than adoption, guardianship, or return to family.				
	Number of Children In Care at Least One Day 01/01/04 – 12/31/04	Number of Children In Care With Perm Plan “Other Planned Living Arrangement”	Number of Children Objective >= 85.00%*	Number of Children Above (Below) Objective
State	7,974	1,114	6,777.90	82.10
Cherokee	97	1	82.45	13.55

* This is a DSS established objective.

<u>Site Visit Findings</u> Performance Item Ratings						
Permanency Item 10: Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement.						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	2	100	0	0	8	0

Explanation

This is a “Strength” for Cherokee DSS. The standard for this objective is that no more than 15% of the children in foster care should have this plan. Approximately 1% of the children in Cherokee DSS custody have this plan. This is because the agency successfully returns almost all of the children to their parents or to relatives.

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Section Four

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

Summary of Findings

Overall Finding:

- Item 11: Proximity of placement
- Item 12: Placement with siblings.
- Item 13: Visiting w/ parents & siblings
- Item 14: Preserving connections
- Item 15: Relative placement
- Item 16: Relationship of child w/ parents

Partially Achieved

- Finding: Strength**
- Finding: Area Needing Improvement**
- Finding: Strength**
- Findings: Area Needing Improvement**
- Findings: Strength**
- Findings: Area Needing Improvement**

Analysis of Permanency Item 11 Findings

Strategic Outcome Report Findings

Measure P4.1: **Proximity of Foster Care Placement** – Of all children in foster care during the reporting period (excluding MTS and Adoptions children), the percent placed within their county of origin.

	Number of Children In Care 01/01/04 – 10/31/04	Number of Children Placed Within County of Origin	Percent of Children Placed Within County of Origin	Number of Children Objective >= 70.00%*	Number of Children Above (Below) Objective
State	5,914	3,896	65.88	4,139.80	(243.80)
Cherokee	97	71	73.20	67.9`0	3.10

* This is a DSS established objective.

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Site Visit Findings Performance Item Ratings						
Permanency Item 11: Proximity of foster care placement.						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	10	100	0	0	0	0

Explanation

This is a “Strength” for Strength DSS. To meet this objective 70%, or more, of the children in care must be placed in Cherokee County. The outcome report indicates that 73% (71/97) of the children in care are placed in the county. Onsite reviewers rated this item by different criteria. If a child was placed in an adjacent county but close to his/her home this item was rated “strength”. If a child was placed out of county to receive medical or behavioral treatment this item was rated “strength”. Onsite reviewers rated all applicable cases “strength”.

Site Visit Findings Performance Item Ratings						
Permanency Item 12: Placement with siblings						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	4	80	1	20	5	0

Explanation

This is an “Area Needing Improvement”. It was apparent that the agency attempted to place siblings together when resources and circumstances made that possible. However, Cherokee DSS does not have sufficient foster homes willing to accept the number and size of sibling groups entering care. When no foster home was available Cherokee DSS placed children in out-of-county and in-county group homes. One sibling group of three sisters under the age of ten was separated upon entering foster care because the agency could not find a foster or group home that would accept all three.

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Site Visit Findings Performance Item Ratings						
Permanency Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	7	87	1	13	2	0

Explanation

This is an “Strength”. It appears that Cherokee DSS arranged visits between siblings in foster care and their parents until logistics and family dynamics made this difficult. Stakeholders interviewed stated that DSS is very effective in planning and facilitating visitation with parents and siblings placed separately in foster care.

Site Visit Findings Performance Item Ratings						
Permanency Item 14: Preserving connections						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	6	86	1	14	3	0

Explanation

This is an “Area Needing Improvement”. This item addresses the agency’s ability to preserve a child in foster care’s connection to his/her community, family, and faith. Cherokee DSS and its foster parents, for the most part, work to preserve those connections. One area needing attention is the effort made to preserve the connections between children in foster care and the family of their non-custodial (usually the father) parent.

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<u>Site Visit Findings</u> Performance Item Ratings						
Permanency Item 15: Relative placement						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	8	89	1	11	1	0

Explanation

This is a “Strength”. This item addresses the agency’s effectiveness in identifying and assessing the relatives of children in foster care as possible caregivers. In 8 of the applicable 9 cases reviewed the child(ren) were either placed with relatives or the workers made every attempt to place with relatives. Workers used available resources (Diligent Search, DNA testing) to identify paternal relatives for placement when necessary. In the one case rated “Area Needing Improvement” there was no documentation to show that any effort was made to contact a relative for possible placement.

Stakeholders rated DSS as being very effective in identifying relatives who could care for children entering foster care and using them as placement settings when appropriate.

<u>Site Visit Findings</u> Performance Item Ratings						
Permanency Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	6	75	2	25	2	0

Explanation

This is an “Area Needing Improvement”. This item addresses the agency’s effectiveness in promoting or maintaining a strong emotionally supportive relationship between children in care and their parents. Case documentation indicates that Cherokee DSS works to strengthen the relationship between the children in care with their parents. One of the cases rated “Area Needing Improvement” involved a relationship between a sibling group of four children in foster care and their mother that was not in the children’s best interest. Even though the caseworker documented the danger continued contact with the mother presents, the steps needed to end that contact did not happen.

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Section Five

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

Summary of Findings

Overall Finding:

- Item 17: Needs & services
- Item 18: Involvement in case planning
- Item 19: Worker visits with child
- Item 20: Worker visits with parent(s)

Partially Achieved

Finding: Strength

Finding: Area Needing Improvement

Finding: Area Needing Improvement

Findings: Area Needing Improvement

Site Visit Findings Performance Item Ratings

Well Being Item 17: Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents

	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	9	90	1	10	0	0
Treatment	6	60	4	40	0	0
Total Cases	15	75	5	25	0	0

Explanation

This item asks two questions: 1) Were the needs of the child, parents, and foster parents assessed, and 2) Did the agency take steps to meet the identified needs? This is an “**Area Needing Improvement**” for Cherokee DSS.

Although 75% of all cases reviewed were rated “Strength”, most of the cases rated “Area Needing Improvement” were treatment cases. The problems identified in those cases varied and formed no pattern. However the deficiencies in assessment and service delivery were well documented and should have been detected if cases were being reviewed by the supervisors. For example, one treatment case involved a ten-year-old girl suspected of being sexually abused, but no forensic interview was done. Another treatment case involved a mother with bipolar disorder with no evidence that her condition was being treated.

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<u>Site Visit Findings</u> Performance Item Ratings						
Well Being Item 18: Child and family involvement in case planning						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	4	45	5	55	1	0
Treatment	7	70	3	30	0	0
Total Cases	11	58	8	42	2	0

Explanation

This is an “**Area Needing Improvement**”. With only 58% of the cases rated “Strength”, involving parents and age-appropriate children in the case planning process is hit-or-miss. Formally scheduled family planning meetings generally do not occur. Some workers make an effort to involve parents in the planning process. Some do not. However, plans that showed no evidence of client involvement were approved by supervisors.

<u>Site Visit Findings</u> Performance Item Ratings						
Well Being Item 19: Worker visits with child						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	8	80	2	20	0	0
Treatment	5	50	5	50	0	0
Total Cases	13	65	7	35	0	0

Explanation

This is an “**Area Needing Improvement**”. This rating is based on two questions: 1) are Cherokee DSS staff visiting children according to policy, and 2) do the visits focus on issues related to the treatment plan? Face-to-Face visits with children receiving in-home treatment services was inconsistent. Home visits were done, but the children were not always seen. In those instances where the children were not seen the safety of those children was assumed, but not verified.

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<u>Site Visit Findings</u> Performance Item Ratings						
Well Being Item 20: Worker visits with parent(s)						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	4	67	2	33	6	0
Treatment	10	100	0	0	0	0
Total Cases	14	86	2	14	7	0

Explanation

This is an “**Area Needing Improvement**” for Cherokee DSS. All treatment cases were rated “Strength”. However, a third of the applicable foster care cases were rated “Area Needing Improvement”. In one case visits between the child and mother stopped because of the therapist’s recommendation, but the therapist’s recommendations did not relieve the caseworker of her responsibility to see the parent. Although this does not appear to be a major problem, caseworkers may need guidance when dealing with unfamiliar circumstances regarding visits with parents.

Section Six

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

Summary of Findings

Overall Finding:

Partially Achieved

<u>Site Visit Findings</u> Performance Item Ratings						
Well Being Item 21: Educational needs of child						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	8	89	1	11	1	0
Treatment	5	56	4	44	1	0
Total Cases	13	72	5	28	2	0

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Explanation

This is an “**Area Needing Improvement**”. This item asks two questions: 1) Did DSS assess the educational needs of the children under their supervision, and 2) Were identified educational needs addressed? With 89% of the foster care cases rated “Strength” the educational needs of children in foster care are being appropriately assessed and attended to. However, the educational needs of children in treatment cases receive far less attention. In the cases rated “Area Needing Improvement” the educational needs of the children in those homes were not addressed at all in the case records. Schools were not contacted.

Section Seven

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

Summary of Findings

Overall Finding:

- Item 22: Physical health of the child
- Item 23: Mental health of the child

Not Achieved

- Finding: Area Needing Improvement**
- Finding: Area Needing Improvement**

Site Visit Findings Performance Item Ratings

Well Being Item 22: Physical health of the child

	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	10	100	0	0	0	0
Treatment	6	60	4	40	0	0
Total Cases	16	80	4	20	0	0

Explanation

This is an “**Area Needing Improvement**”. The physical health needs of all of the foster care children reviewed (100%) were properly attended to. Case records contained immunization records and other health information. Dictation indicated that the workers continuously discussed and assessed the children’s medical needs. However, the physical health needs of children in treatment cases were less likely to be assessed or met. As was true of educational needs described above, the cases rated “Area Needing Improvement” for physical health received that rating because the case records contained no indication that the physical health needs of the children were assess at all.

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<u>Site Visit Findings</u> Performance Item Ratings						
Well Being Item 23: Mental health of the child						
	Strength		Area Needing Improvement		Not Applicable	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Foster Care	8	89	1	11	1	0
Treatment	5	63	3	37	2	0
Total Cases	13	76	4	24	9	0

Explanation

This is an “**Area Needing Improvement**”. Documentation in the case records indicated that children in foster care were assessed for Mental Health services and received counseling as needed. Children in treatment cases were less likely to have their mental health needs met.

It should be noted that the same treatment cases received poor ratings for Education, Physical Health and Mental Health. This problem may be worker or unit specific. In either case, the needs of the children in those families were not met.

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Section Eight – Foster Home Licenses

At the time of the onsite review there were 28 foster homes licensed by DSS in Cherokee County. Ten of those licensing records were reviewed. Five different staff were assigned licensing duties in the two years prior to the onsite review. The staff person responsible for foster home licensing at the time of the onsite review had recently been assigned those duties. Licensing staff also manage a foster care caseload, which often takes priority over licensing tasks. Consequently, problems were found in all ten records reviewed.

1. Assessments of licensed foster homes were inadequate.
2. Quarterly visits to foster homes by licensing worker did not occur. Foster homes were visited once or twice a year. Not everyone in the home was seen.
3. No evidence that foster parents received required training to have their licenses renewed.
4. No documentation to show that safety issues were addressed with foster parents.
5. Files were disorganized and did not contain required documentation.
6. Licenses were issued late, and issued without supporting documentation (i.e. inspections, background checks, etc.).

Section Nine – Unfounded Investigations

	Yes	No
Investigation Initiated Timely?	5	0
Assessment Adequate?	4	1
Case Decision Appropriate?	4	1

Investigated cases of abuse or neglect are unfounded when the evidence indicates that abuse or neglect more likely did not occur, and when there is insufficient evidence to substantiate the abuse or neglect. The decision to unfound an investigation is only as good as the quality of the assessment/investigation. Four of the five cases reviewed received adequate assessments that supported the decision to unfound the case. The decision to unfound one of the five cases reviewed was inappropriate because the assessment was inadequate. In that case the assessment worker took the word of the mother being investigated that her infant was receiving needed medical care. The worker did not contact the child's doctor to verify this.

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Section Ten – Screened Out Intakes

Explanation

Not all calls made to DSS meet the legal definition of child abuse or neglect. Each DSS office must have an intake process that accurately determines which calls should be accepted for investigation and which should be screened out. Ten screened out intakes were reviewed.

Total screened-out intakes reviewed	10
Total screened out appropriately	9
Documented Referrals	0
Documented Collateral Contacts	0

Screened out intakes are evaluated solely on the information contained in the agency database CAPSS. Nine of the 10 screened-out intakes reviewed were deemed appropriate. Comments on 5 of the 10 review instruments indicate that documentation in CAPSS was not sufficient to assess the appropriateness of the decision; that CAPSS did not indicate if collateral contacts or referrals were made.

The lack of or absence of this information is significant because there is no documentation to support the agency's decision. More importantly, the lack of information undermines the intent of Stephanie's Law, which intends to create an intake history that contributes to the assessment of future intakes.

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Case Rating Summary

The performance and outcome ratings below show the number of cases receiving that rating, followed by the percent of the total that number represents. Not Applicable (N/A) cases do not factor in the percentage.

Performance Item or Outcome	Perf. Item Ratings			Outcome Ratings			
	Strength	Area Needing Improvement	N/A*	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	N/A*
Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.				19 (95%)	1 (5%)	0	0
Item 1: Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment	8 (100%)	0	12				
Item 2: Repeat maltreatment	19 (95%)	1 (5%)	0				
Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.				15 (75%)	2 (10%)	3 (15%)	
Item 3: Services to family to protect child (ren) in home and prevent removal	11 (79%)	3 (21%)	6				
Item 4: Risk of harm to child (ren)	15 (75%)	5 (25%)	1				
Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.				9 (90%)	1 (10%)	0	0
Item 5: Foster care re-entries	3 (100%)	0	7				
Item 6: Stability of foster care placement	10 (100%)	0	0				
Item 7: Permanency goal for child	10 (100%)	0	0				
Item 8: Reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives	6 (100%)	0	4				
Item 9: Adoption	2 (67%)	1 (33%)	7				
Item 10: Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement	2 (100%)	0	8				
Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.				9 (90%)	1 (10%)	0	0
Item 11: Proximity of foster care placement	10 (100%)	0	0				
Item 12: Placement with siblings	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	5				
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care	7 (87%)	1 (13%)	2				
Item 14: Preserving connections	6 (86%)	1 (14%)	3				
Item 15: Relative placement	8 (89%)	1 (11%)	1				
Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents	6 (75%)	2 (25%)	2				
Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.				12 (60%)	8 (40%)	0	0
Item 17: Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents	15 (75%)	5 (25%)	0				
Item 18: Child and family involvement in case planning	11 (58%)	8 (42%)	1				
Item 19: Worker visits with child	13 (65%)	7 (35%)	0				
Item 20: Worker visits with parent(s)	14 (87%)	2 (13%)	4				
Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.				13 (72%)	1 (6%)	4 (22%)	2
Item 21: Educational needs of the child	13 (72%)	5 (28%)	2				
Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.				15 (75%)	2 (10%)	3 (15%)	0
Item 22: Physical health of the child	16 (80%)	4 (20%)	0				
Item 23: Mental health of the child	13 (76%)	4 (24%)	3				

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