

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

This report describes the results of the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) Barnwell County Quality Assurance Review, conducted May 14 – 18, 2012.

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

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

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

Outcome	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved
Safety 1 <i>Children Are, First and Foremost, Protected from Abuse and Neglect</i>	75% (3)	25% (1)	0% (0)
Safety 2 <i>Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate</i>	70% (14)	10% (2)	20% (4)
Permanency 1 <i>Children have permanency and stability in their living situations</i>	30% (3)	60% (6)	10% (1)
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>	25% (5)	65% (13)	10% (2)
Well-Being 2 <i>Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs</i>	78% (7)	11% (1)	11% (1)
Well-Being 3 <i>Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs</i>	53% (9)	18% (3)	29% (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 in-home treatment cases. Quality Assurance staff conducted a more in-depth analysis on items where 50 percent or fewer cases received a strength rating. These results can be found in Table 9.

SECTION I: REVIEW FINDINGS

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

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

Item 1: Timeliness of initiating investigations

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

Table 2.

Rating	Item 1	Item 2
Strength	15%(3)	20%(4)
Area Needing Improvement	5%(1)	0%(0)
Not Applicable	80%(16)	80%(16)
Total	100%(20)	100%(20)
% Strengths	75%(3)	100%(4)

Item 2: Repeat maltreatment

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

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

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

Item 3: Services to family

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

Table 3.

Rating	Item 3	Item 4
Strength	45%(9)	70%(14)
Area Needing Improvement	20%(4)	30%(6)
Not Applicable	35%(7)	0%(0)
Total	100%(20)	100%(20)
% Strengths	69.2%(9)	70%(14)

Item 4: Risk assessment and safety management

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

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

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

Item 5: Foster Care reentries

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

Item 6: Stability of foster care placement

Purpose of Assessment: To determine if the child in foster care is in a stable placement at the time of the onsite review and that any changes in placement that occurred during the period under review were in the best interest of the child and consistent with achieving the child's permanency goal(s).

Item 7: Permanency goal for child

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

Item 8: Reunification, guardianship or permanent placement with relatives

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

Item 9: Adoption

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

Item 10: Other planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA)

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

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

Table 4.

Rating	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8	Item 9	Item 10
Strength	5%(1)	40%(8)	20%(4)	15%(3)	0%(0)	0%(0)
Area Needing Improvement	0%(0)	10%(2)	30%(6)	10%(2)	25%(5)	10%(2)
Not Applicable	95%(19)	50%(10)	50%(10)	75%(15)	75%(15)	90%(18)
Total	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)
% Strengths	100%(1)	80%(8)	40%(4)	60%(3)	0%(0)	0%(0)

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

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

Item 11: Proximity of Foster Care Placement

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

Item 12: Placement with siblings

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

Item 13: Visiting with parents & siblings in foster care

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

Item 14: Preserving connections

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

Item 15: Relative placement

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

Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents

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

Table 5.

Rating	Item 11	Item 12	Item 13	Item 14	Item 15	Item 16
Strength	40%(8)	10%(2)	10%(2)	40%(8)	20%(4)	5%(1)
Area Needing Improvement	0%(0)	5%(1)	35%(7)	10%(2)	10%(2)	30%(6)
Not Applicable	60%(12)	85%(17)	55%(11)	50%(10)	70%(14)	65%(13)
Total	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)
% Strengths	100%(8)	66.7%(2)	22.2%(2)	80%(8)	66.7%(4)	14.3%(1)

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

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

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

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

Item 18: Child & family involvement in case planning

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

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	25%(5)	20%(4)	90%(18)	5%(1)
Area Needing Improvement	75%(15)	75%(15)	10%(2)	85%(17)
Not Applicable	0%(0)	5%(1)	0%(0)	10%(2)
Total	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)	100%(20)
% Strengths	25%(5)	21.1%(4)	90%(18)	5.6%(1)

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	35%(7)
Area Needing Improvement	10%(2)
Not Applicable	55%(11)
Total	100%(20)
% Strengths	77.8%(7)

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
Strength	30%(6)	45%(9)
Area Needing Improvement	40%(8)	10%(2)
Not Applicable	30%(6)	45%(9)
Total	100%(20)	100%(20)
% Strengths	42.9%(6)	81.8%(9)

Summary

Many positives were found with the cases. Items 1, 2, and 21 were identified as strengths of the agency. In some cases, on-going formal and informal assessments were completed through monthly home visits and services were provided as needed. In one case, there was evidence of a good relationship between the child and the worker. Some cases did have good documentation and identified efforts to engage the father. Some caseworkers did a good job of engaging birth parents in the case plan. In one case, the agency did a great job of locating an adoptive placement for the child. Another case had an appropriately identified concurrent goal and the worker did a good job of working both goals.

Reviewers identified several concerns. The risk and safety of children were not adequately assessed in some cases. Additionally, actions to terminate parental rights were not always conducted in a timely manner. In many cases, the needs of children and parents are not adequately assessed, follow-up services are not always provided to meet identified needs, and the agency does not always adequately follow-up with families to ensure families are taking advantage of the offered services. Non-custodial parents, particularly the fathers, often are not being engaged in the case planning process. Appropriate goals are not always established in a timely manner. Table 9 provides additional information on items where the agency needs additional improvement.

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

Item #	Item Description	Issues Summary
7	Permanency goal for child	Item 7 had 40 percent strengths. For several cases, the goal or concurrent goal of adoption was not established in a timely manner. In one case, the concurrent goal of adoption was not appropriate.
9	Adoption	Items 9 and 10 had no cases that were rated as a strength. For Item 9, the agency did not make sufficient efforts to move a child toward adoption. In another case, the agency failed to file the TPR petition and failed to establish a timely concurrent plan of adoption, which caused a delay in establishing permanency. In a third case, the agency failed to work the concurrent plan of adoption.
10	Other planned perm living arrangement	For Item 10, the agency did not make concerted efforts to achieve the goal of APPLA in a timely manner by placing the target child in a living arrangement that is considered permanent. In another case, the goal of independence was not achieved prior to the youth's discharge from foster care.
13	Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care	For Item 13, there were 22 percent strengths. One case was rated as an area needing improvement because there were no visits scheduled or held during the period under review with either the birth mother or birth father and the target child. In another case, the agency did not make concerted efforts to arrange contact/visits between the birth father, who lived out-of-state, and target child. In a third case, the agency did not make concerted efforts to facilitate visitation to promote the continuity of the target child's relationship with his father.
16	Relationship of child in care with parents	Item 16 had 14 percent strengths. For this item, the agency did not make concerted efforts to promote positive relationships between the target child and his/her relatives. For example, the agency did not make efforts to include the birth parents in medical appointments or school functions.
17	Needs & services for child, parents, caregivers	25 percent of the cases were rated as a strength for Item 17. Several of the cases were rated as an area needing improvement because the agency did not conduct monthly on-going or informal assessment of parents and services were not referred or provided to parents.

Item #	Item Description	Issues Summary
18	Child & family involvement in case planning	For Item 18, the agency failed to engage birth families in case planning. In one case, the parents indicated that they were confused about case planning because they were working their treatment plan for reunification while attending court hearings to have their rights terminated.
20	Worker visits with parents	One case was rated a strength for item 20. Cases were rated as area needing improvement because the visits were not frequent enough to assess safety, permanency, and well-being. In one case, the agency was aware of the whereabouts of the birth mother and birth father during the period under review and did not make any attempts to engage them. In another case, there was a lack of dictation in the case file that indicated that the agency sufficiently addressed issues pertaining to safety, permanency, and well-being.
22	Physical health of the child	For Item 22, cases were rated as area needing improvement because there were no medical records in the files. In one case, prior to the period under review the oldest child had multiple health and dental issues which would make it reasonable to expect the agency to follow up with medical providers to determine if there were additional needs and to receive medical progress notes; however, there is no evidence to support these actions were taken. In another case, there were no updated medical or dental records in the file during the period under review to ensure that the target child received ongoing periodic preventive physical and dental health screenings to identify and avoid potential problems.

SECTION II: FOSTER CARE LICENSE REVIEW

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

Section One review criteria include the following items:

- applications
- autobiography information
- financial information
- child factor's checklists
- initial home assessment studies
- references
- information related to firearms and ammunition in the house
- pet vaccination information
- background checks
- 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, and
- 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 in Barnwell County are noted in Table 10.

Section One is rated as an area of strength. Only one initial license was reviewed and all licensing requirements were met per policy prior to the issuance of the initial license. CPS, sexual offender, and SLED checks and the fire inspection were not completed annually as required.

Table 10. Summary of Ratings for Sections One and Two

Rating	Section One	Section Two
Strength	1(10%)	5(50%)
Area Needing Improvement	0(0%)	4(40%)
Not Applicable	9(90%)	1(10%)
Total	10(100%)	10(100%)
% Strengths	100%	55.6%

In Section Two, five of the cases reviewed were rated strengths 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 four cases include:

- Several background safety checks are required annually for the foster parents. In one of the cases reviewed, sexual offender and Central Registry were not conducted annually.
- In one case, the fire inspection was not conducted annually.
- In four of the cases, several of the safety background checks were not being conducted on alternate caregivers or other adults living in the home including SLED, FBI, Central Registry, and sexual offender checks.
- In one case, one of the foster parents did not have documentation for the completion of 28 hours of continuing training.

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

- Background safety checks were not completed on all alternative caregivers.
- Quarterly home visits not completed timely, consistently; not all family members were visited; and documentation not entered into CAPSS.
- Supervisory reviews of quarterly home visits were not conducted on a regular basis.
- Fire drills were either not done or not recorded properly.
- Quarterly Home Visit Guides are not always completed.

Table 11. Section 3: Other Standard Licensing and Practice Issues

	Yes	No	NA	Total
A. Home visits documented in CAPSS?	9	1	0	10
A.1. Adult household members visited?	6	2	0	8
B. CAPSS consistent with 1513?	9	1	0	10
C. Licensing issues addressed during each quarterly visit documented in CAPSS?	9	0	0	9
D. Supervisory Review conducted	5	4	0	9
E. Discussion of safety guidelines regarding access to in-ground swimming pools documented in CAPSS?	1	0	9	10
F. Background checks completed on alternative caregivers?	1	2	7	10

SECTION III: CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICE SCREEN-OUT REVIEW

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

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

Yes answers are considered strengths, no answers are considered area needing improvement (ANI), and N/A answers are considered Not Applicable.

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

Table 12. Summary of Ratings for Screen-Outs Review

Rating	Was this case appropriately screened out?	Were necessary collaterals contacted?	Were appropriate referrals made?
Strength	5(71%)	3(43%)	1(14%)
Area Needing Improvement	2(29%)	3(43%)	0(0%)
Not Applicable	0(0%)	1(14%)	6(86%)
Total	7(100%)	7(100%)	7(100%)
% Strengths	71.4%	50%	100%

Two cases were determined to be screened out inappropriately. In one case, there was a reason to suspect substantial risk of physical abuse; therefore, an investigation should have been conducted. In the second case, the issues present in the household that were stated in the documentation were not included in the report. This information should have been included and meets the level and warrant an investigation for alleged child abuse/neglect.

Necessary collateral contacts were not made or were not documented in three of the six applicable cases reviewed. In one case, a collateral contact was made but it is not clear to whom it was made. In a second case the agency should have contacted law enforcement rather than telling the reporter to contact them. In the third case, the agency should have contacted law enforcement complete a record's check on the father's girlfriend to determine if there were any concerns with that family that may have supported the concerns stated by the reporter.

SECTION IV: CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES UNFOUNDED REPORTS REVIEW

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

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

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

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

Table 13. Summary of Ratings for Unfounded Reports Review

Rating	Was the investigation initiated in a timely manner?	Was an adequate assessment conducted?	Was the decision to unfound the case appropriate?
Strength	4(80%)	3(60%)	3(60%)
Area Needing Improvement	1(20%)	2(40%)	2(40%)
Total	5(100%)	5(100%)	5(100%)
% Strengths	80%	60%	60%

Based upon this review process, one case was not initiated in a timely manner. The rating for the case was high indicating the face-to-face meeting should have occurred within two hours. The actual contact was made outside of this timeframe.

An inadequate assessment was found to have been conducted in two cases. In one case, the mother did not appear to be able to protect the victim child from her and/or others. The case was still closed and no collaterals were contacted. In the second case, allegations were not discussed with the parents or with the children. During this investigation the caseworker only conducted one collateral contact. The second contact discovered during discussion with the first contact was not contacted. The reviewer was unable to locate a copy of the CFASP tool or copy of the Child Safety Assessment in the case file or in CAPSS. The caseworker noted in her dictation that the family was still asleep when she arrived to the home for the final visit before closure and the children did not speak to her much during this visit because they were just waking up.

Two cases were found to have been unfounded inappropriately. In the first case, there were great safety concerns and all appropriate collaterals were not contacted. In the second case, there was not enough information gathered to unfound this case. The allegations that brought this family to the attention of the agency were never discussed with the parents or the children