

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

---

This report describes the results of the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) Charleston County Quality Assurance Review, conducted July 23-27, 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 an overall 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 Quality Assurance Onsite Reviews – Ratings by Outcome**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Substantially Achieved</b>	<b>Partially Achieved</b>	<b>Not Achieved</b>
<b>Safety 1</b> <i>Children are, First and Foremost, Protected from Abuse and Neglect</i>	40% (2)	60% (5)	0% (0)
<b>Safety 2</b> <i>Children are Safely Maintained in their Homes whenever Possible and Appropriate</i>	40% (8)	20% (4)	40% (8)
<b>Permanency 1</b> <i>Children have Permanency and Stability in their Living Situations</i>	0% (0)	80% (8)	20% (2)
<b>Permanency 2</b> <i>The Continuity of Family Relationships and Connections is Preserved for Children</i>	11.1% (1)	77.8% (7)	11.1% (1)
<b>Well-Being 1</b> <i>Families have Enhanced Capacity to Provide for their Children’s Needs</i>	20% (4)	40% (8)	40% (8)
<b>Well-Being 2</b> <i>Children receive Appropriate Services to meet their Educational Needs</i>	87.5% (7)	0% (0)	12.5% (1)
<b>Well-Being 3</b> <i>Children receive Adequate Services to meet their Physical and Mental Health Needs</i>	50% (7)	28.6% (4)	21.4% (3)

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.

**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>	10% (2)	25% (5)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	15% (3)	0% (0)
<i>Not applicable</i>	75% (15)	75% (15)
Total	100% (20)	100% (20)
<i>% Strengths</i>	<b>40% (2)</b>	<b>100% (7)</b>

**Item 2: Repeat maltreatment**

Purpose of Assessment: To determine if any child in the family experienced repeat maltreatment within a six-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>	15% (3)	50% (10)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	45% (9)	50% (10)
<i>Not applicable</i>	40% (8)	0% (0)
Total	100% (20)	100% (20)
<i>% Strengths</i>	<b>25% (3)</b>	<b>50% (10)</b>

**Item 4: Risk assessment and safety management**

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

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

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

**Item 5: Foster Care reentries**

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

**Item 6: Stability of foster care placement**

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

**Item 7: Permanency goal for child**

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

**Item 8: Reunification, guardianship or permanent placement with relatives**

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

**Item 9: Adoption**

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

**Item 10: Other planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA)**

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

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

Table 4.

Rating	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8	Item 9	Item 10
<i>Strength</i>	5% (1)	35% (7)	5% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	10% (2)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	0% (0)	15% (3)	45% (9)	30% (6)	30% (6)	5% (1)
<i>Not applicable</i>	95% (19)	50% (10)	50% (10)	70% (14)	70% (14)	85% (17)
Total	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)
<i>% Strengths</i>	<b>100% (1)</b>	<b>70% (7)</b>	<b>10% (1)</b>	<b>0% (0)</b>	<b>0% (0)</b>	<b>66.7% (2)</b>

**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 and 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
<i>Strength</i>	25% (5)	30% (6)	5% (1)	20% (4)	10% (2)	0% (0)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	0% (0)	10% (2)	30% (6)	20% (4)	25% (5)	30% (6)
<i>Not applicable</i>	75% (15)	60% (12)	65% (13)	60% (12)	65% (13)	70% (14)
Total	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)
<i>% Strengths</i>	<b>100% (5)</b>	<b>75% (6)</b>	<b>14.3% (1)</b>	<b>50% (4)</b>	<b>28.6% (2)</b>	<b>0% (0)</b>

**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, and 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
<i>Strength</i>	25% (5)	15% (3)	60% (12)	0% (0)
<i>Area Needing Improvement</i>	75% (15)	75% (15)	40% (8)	80% (16)
<i>Not Applicable</i>	0% (0)	10% (2)	0% (0)	20% (4)
Total	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)	100% (20)
<i>% Strengths</i>	<b>25% (5)</b>	<b>16.7% (3)</b>	<b>60% (12)</b>	<b>0% (0)</b>

**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
<i>Strength</i>	35% (7)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	5% (1)
<i>Not applicable</i>	60% (12)
Total	100% (20)
<i>% Strengths</i>	<b>87.5% (7)</b>

**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.**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Item 22</b>	<b>Item 23</b>
<i>Strength</i>	40% (8)	35% (7)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	30% (6)	15% (3)
<i>Not applicable</i>	30% (6)	50% (10)
Total	100% (20)	100% (20)
<b>% Strengths</b>	<b>57.1% (8)</b>	<b>70% (7)</b>

**Summary of Strengths and Areas of Concern**

Many positives were found with the cases. *Items 2, 5, and 11* were identified as *strengths* of the agency because all of the cases reviewed were rated as *strengths* with no *Area Needing Improvement (ANI)*. This means that for the cases reviewed, repeat maltreatment did not occur within the past six months, no children returned to foster care during the PUR, and concerted efforts were made to ensure that children in foster care were placed close enough to their parents to facilitate face-to-face contact.

Reviewers identified several concerns related to all of the child welfare outcomes, four specific onsite review instrument (OSRI) *items*, and one specific case.

All of the child welfare outcomes (i.e., *Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being*) had *ANI* ratings on 20 of the 23 *items*.

*Items 8 (Reunification, Guardianship, or Permanent Placement with Relatives), 9 (Adoption), 16 (Relationship of Child in Care with Parents), and 20 (Caseworker Visits with Parents)* lacked any *strengths*, highlighting that case workers are not proficient at achieving reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with a relative in a timely manner; achieving adoption in a timely manner; promoting, supporting, or maintaining positive relationships between the child in foster care and his or her parent(s) or primary caregiver(s) through activities other than arranging visitation; or ensuring sufficient frequency and quality of visits between the case worker and parent(s) of the child(ren) to provide safety, permanency, and well-being of the child(ren) and promote achievement of case goals.

One *Treatment Case* did not have any *strengths* across all of the *items* in the OSRI.

## SECTION II: FOSTER CARE LICENSE REVIEW

As part of the Quality Assurance Review Process in Charleston 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 CAPSS

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 CAPSS

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 Charleston County are noted in Table 9.

In Section One, the one applicable case was rated as *strength* because all of the licensing requirements were met in accordance to policy. Overall, the file was well organized and documented.

**Table 9. Summary of Ratings for Sections One and Two**

Rating	Section One	Section Two
<i>Strength</i>	1 (10%)	7 (70%)
<i>Area Needing Improvement</i>	0 (00%)	2 (20%)
<i>Not Applicable</i>	9 (90%)	1 (10%)
Total	10 (100%)	10 (100%)
% Strengths	<b>100%</b>	<b>70%</b>

In Section Two, seven of the nine applicable cases reviewed were rated as *strength* because all of the licensing requirements were met prior to

authorization of the license renewal. Issues identified in Section Two that led to the rating of *ANI* for two cases include:

- A home was licensed for four children between the ages of 3 and 18 but the home had five children with two of the children under the age of 3.
- Information in CAPSS and licensure file did not match (two adult children were listed as living in the home but according to the re-assessment the adult children were not living in the home).
- All licensure requirements were not met prior to the issuance of the license renewal (i.e., an FBI check was not conducted on the foster parent’s daughter who lives in the home when on break from college).

Section Three results are displayed in Table 10. Deficiencies were noted in seven of the ten files reviewed. Deficiencies noted in Section Three may not invalidate the license, but still require attention and correction by county management. The issues identified by the reviewers regarded quarterly home visits and missing information.

- Quarterly home visits were not conducted each quarter or were not conducted for every person living in the home each quarter.
- Missing information:
  - Reviewers were not able to find inspections, medical records, and/or FBI checks.
  - Licensing issues in the quarterly home visiting guide were not addressed in CAPSS.
  - Quarterly home visit guide was not in a case file.

**Table 10. Section 3: Other Standard Licensing and Practice Issues**

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



### SECTION III: CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICE SCREEN-OUT REVIEW

A review of ten 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:

- Was this case appropriately screened out? Rated as *yes, no, or cannot determine*.
- Were necessary collateral contacts made? Rated as *yes, no, or not applicable*.
- Were appropriate referrals made? Rated as *yes, no, or not applicable*.

Yes answers are considered *strengths*, No answers are considered *Area Needing Improvement (ANI)*, and N/A answers are *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 are noted in Table 11.

**Table 11. Summary of Ratings for Screen-Outs Review**

Rating	Was this case appropriately screened out?	Were necessary collaterals contacted?	Were appropriate referrals made?
<i>Strength</i>	8 (80%)	7 (70%)	1 (10%)
<i>Area Needing Improvement</i>	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)
<i>Not Applicable</i>	0 (0%)	2 (20%)	8 (80%)
Cannot Determine	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	10 (100%)	10 (100%)	10 (100%)
<i>% Strengths</i>	<b>80%</b>	<b>87.5%</b>	<b>50%</b>

Two cases were determined to be screened out inappropriately for the ten applicable cases. In the first case, when a new report came in regarding inappropriate sexual behavior, the family had an open case indicated for physical neglect. The new and prior allegations are of two different typologies and therefore should not have been screened-out. In the second case, prior allegations of sexual abuse by the father were unfounded in another state due to the lack of physical evidence (the victim child did not recant and continues to stick with her story). The agency had a previous case of sexual abuse with this family and the same perpetrator and the case should not have been screened-out.

Necessary collateral contacts were not made for one of the eight applicable cases. In this case, the school should have been contacted by the agency to assess concerns related to tardiness, differences in physical appearance, changes academically, or any statements made relating to the allegations.

Of the two cases that required a referral, one case did not have the appropriate referral made. In this case, the children could have been referred for a forensic interview to rule out any possible sexual abuse.

**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 (all rated as *yes* or *no*):

- Was the investigation initiated in a timely manner?
- Was an adequate assessment conducted?
- Was the decision to unfound the case appropriate?

Questions rated as *Yes* on the assessment are considered *strengths* and those rated as *No* are considered *Area Needs Improvement (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 are noted in Table 12.

**Table 12. 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?
<i>Strength</i>	5 (100%)	3 (60%)	4 (80%)
<i>Area Needing Improvement</i>	0 (0%)	2 (40%)	1 (20%)
Total	5 (100%)	5 (100%)	5 (100%)
<i>% Strengths</i>	<b>100%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>80%</b>

Of the five cases reviewed, the reviewers determined that the agency initiated all of the investigations in a timely manner.

Two of the five cases reviewed did not have an adequate assessment conducted. In the first case, the reviewer determined that the investigation was inadequate and not comprehensive enough to determine if there were any other safety/risk concerns in the home and face-to-face contact was not made in a timely manner with the alleged perpetrator (15 days after the report was accepted). Additionally, there were no documented visits to the family home to assess for safety/risks and the adult biological child to the alleged perpetrator was never assessed regarding safety/risk and/or interviewed about the allegations in the home.

In the second case, contact with the alleged perpetrator (physical abuse) was not documented into CAPSS and therefore, the reviewer was unable to determine if he was ever seen and/or interviewed. The reviewer was also unable to determine how safety/risk was assessed as there were no documented home visits. There were also no medical records (i.e. admission and discharge summary) in the case file from the day of the incident.

In a third case, the decision to unfound the case was inappropriate. In this case, the decision to unfound the case was not appropriate due to the inadequate investigation and making the decision to unfound the case based on the victim child recanting is unsatisfactory.