

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 May 13-17, 2013.

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

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

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

Outcome	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved
Safety 1 <i>Children Are, First and Foremost, Protected from Abuse and Neglect</i>	77.8% (7)	22.2% (2)	0% (0)
Safety 2 <i>Children are Safely Maintained in their Homes whenever Possible and Appropriate</i>	60% (18)	20% (6)	20% (6)
Permanency 1 <i>Children have Permanency and Stability in their Living Situations</i>	33.3% (5)	53.3% (8)	13.4% (2)
Permanency 2 <i>The Continuity of Family Relationships and Connections is Preserved for Children</i>	26.7% (4)	66.7% (10)	6.6% (1)
Well-Being 1 <i>Families have Enhanced Capacity to Provide for their Children's Needs</i>	26.7% (8)	53.3% (16)	20% (6)
Well-Being 2 <i>Children receive Appropriate Services to meet their Educational Needs</i>	68.8% (11)	25% (4)	6.2% (1)
Well-Being 3 <i>Children receive Adequate Services to meet their Physical and Mental Health Needs</i>	33.4% (9)	29.6% (8)	37% (10)

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*.

Thirty cases were reviewed including fifteen foster care and fifteen family preservation cases.

SECTION I: REVIEW FINDINGS

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

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

Item 1: Timeliness of initiating investigations

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

Table 2.

Rating	Item 1	Item 2
<i>Strength</i>	23.3% (7)	23.3% (7)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	6.7% (2)	0% (0)
<i>Not Applicable</i>	70% (21)	76.7% (23)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	77.8% (7)	100% (7)

Item 2: Repeat maltreatment

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

Safety Outcome 2: Children Are Safely Maintained in Their Homes Whenever Possible and Appropriate

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

Item 3: Services to family

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

Table 3.

Rating	Item 3	Item 4
<i>Strength</i>	53.3% (16)	60% (18)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	20% (6)	40% (12)
<i>Not Applicable</i>	26.7% (8)	0% (0)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	72.7% (16)	60% (18)

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; or
- 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	16.7% (5)	36.7% (11)	26.7% (8)	13.3% (4)	6.7% (2)	10% (3)
Area needing improvement	0% (0)	13.3% (4)	23.3% (7)	10% (3)	16.7% (5)	6.7% (2)
Not Applicable	83.3% (25)	50% (15)	50% (15)	76.7% (23)	76.6% (23)	83.3% (25)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)
% Strengths	100% (5)	73.3% (11)	53.3% (8)	57.1% (4)	28.6% (2)	60% (3)

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

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

Item 11: Proximity of Foster Care Placement

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

Item 12: Placement with siblings

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

Item 13: Visiting with parents & siblings in foster care

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

Item 14: Preserving connections

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

Item 15: Relative placement

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

Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents

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

Table 5.

Rating	Item 11	Item 12	Item 13	Item 14	Item 15	Item 16
<i>Strength</i>	33.3% (10)	23.3% (7)	10% (3)	20% (6)	20% (6)	6.7% (2)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	3.3% (1)	13.3% (4)	33.3% (10)	26.7% (8)	23.3% (7)	26.7% (8)
Not Applicable	63.4% (19)	63.4% (19)	56.7% (17)	53.3% (16)	56.7% (17)	66.6% (20)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	90.9% (10)	63.6% (7)	23.1% (3)	42.9% (6)	46.2% (6)	20% (2)

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	46.7% (14)	43.3% (13)	53.3% (16)	10% (3)
Area needing improvement	53.3% (16)	56.7% (17)	46.7% (14)	76.7% (23)
Not Applicable	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	13.3% (4)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)
% Strengths	46.7% (14)	43.3% (13)	53.3% (16)	11.5% (3)

Well-Being Outcome 2: Children Receive Appropriate Services to Meet Their Educational Needs

One item is included under Well-Being Outcome 2. Ratings for the item are shown in Table 7.

Item 21: Educational needs of child

Purpose of Assessment: To assess whether, during the period under review, the agency made concerted efforts to assess children’s educational needs at the initial contact with the child (if the case was opened during the period under review) or on an ongoing basis (if the case was opened before the period under review), and whether identified needs were appropriately addressed in case planning and case management activities.

Table 7.

Rating	Item 21
Strength	36.7% (11)
Area needing improvement	16.7% (5)
Not Applicable	46.6% (14)
Total	100% (30)
% Strengths	68.8% (11)

Well-Being Outcome 3: Children Receive Adequate Services to Meet Their Physical and Mental Health Needs

Two items are included under Well-Being Outcome 3. Ratings for the items are shown in Table 8.

Item 22: Physical health of child

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, the agency addressed the physical health needs of the child, including dental health needs.

Item 23: Mental/behavioral health of child

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, the agency addressed the mental/behavioral health needs of the child(ren).

Table 8.

Rating	Item 22	Item 23
<i>Strength</i>	26.7% (8)	50% (15)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	50% (15)	20% (6)
Not Applicable	23.3% (7)	30% (9)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)
% Strengths	34.8% (8)	71.4% (15)

Summary

Two positives were found with the cases. *Items 2 and 5* were identified as *strengths* of the agency; all of the cases reviewed were rated as *strengths* with no *areas needing improvement* (ANI). This means that for the cases reviewed, children did not experience repeat maltreatment (2) and no children returned to foster care during the Period Under Review (5).

Reviewers identified several concerns. Three family preservation cases had only one *item* rated as *strength* and another two family preservation cases had only two *items* rated as *strength*. *Items 13, 16, and 20* had almost all applicable cases rated as *area needing improvement*.

One treatment case was replaced with an alternate because the agency could not locate the case file. As of June 3, 2013, all cases on the sample list will be reviewed regardless of missing physical case files unless the case meets another exclusion criterion as described in the Case Eligibility/Elimination Plan and Measurement Plan.

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; and 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 are noted in Table 9.

Section One. Three foster care issuances for initial/standard licenses were reviewed. None were rated as *strength* because not all of the licensing requirements were met prior to authorization of the initial license. Issues identified in Section One that led to the rating of *ANI* for all three cases include:

- Documentation did not indicate that firearm ammunition was stored in a separate location from firearms.
- Case files did not have information on alternative caregivers and, consequently, background checks were not conducted.
- A health inspection was insufficient and required either DSS follow-up or DHEC re-inspection.

Section Two. One of the seven 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 six cases include:

Table 9. Summary of Ratings for Sections One and Two

Rating	Section One: Initial	Section Two: Renewal
<i>Strength</i>	0 (0%)	1 (14.3%)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	3 (100%)	6 (85.7%)
Total	3 (100%)	7(100%)
% <i>Strengths</i>	0 (0%)	1 (14.3%)

- FBI checks were not completed.
- CAPSS did not reflect details that were listed on the foster care license.
- Case files did not have information on alternative caregivers and consequently, background checks were not conducted.
- There was a discrepancy in the documentation of household composition (between the Quarterly Visit and CAPSS).
- Documentation did not support that foster parents completed the required training hours.
- Fire drills were not completed or documented.
- An updated health inspection was not in the case file.
- Quarterly reviews were not consistently completed on a quarterly basis during the re-licensure period.
- Medical records were not in the case files.
- Up-to-date pet vaccinations were not on record.

Section Three results are displayed in Table 10. Deficiencies were noted in five of 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:

- Foster parents were not responsive to the agency.
- Information regarding training for license renewal was not provided.
- Household members were not visited and/or seen during the quarterly visits.
- The documentations for the quarterly visits during the past 12 months were very generic and did not address specific licensing issues.

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

	Yes	No	NA	Total
A.1. Home visits documented in CAPSS?	10	0	0	10
A.2. Adult household members visited?	7	3	0	10
B. CAPSS consistent with 1513?	10	0	0	10
C. Licensing issues addressed during each quarterly visit documented in CAPSS?	7	1	2	10
D. Supervisory Review conducted	10	0	0	10
E. Discussion of safety guidelines regarding access to in-ground swimming pools documented in CAPSS?	0	0	10	10
F. Background checks completed on alternative caregivers?	2	5	3	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 of these reviews 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>	10 (100%)	4 (40%)	1 (10%)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Not Applicable	0 (0%)	6 (60%)	9 (90%)
Total	10 (100%)	10 (100%)	10 (100%)
% <i>Strengths</i>	10 (100%)	4 (100%)	1 (100%)

All applicable cases had collaterals who were contacted and made appropriate referrals. Additionally, none of the cases reviewed were determined to be screened out inappropriately.

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 Needing 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 of these reviews 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>	3 (60%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	2 (40%)	3 (60%)	3 (60%)
Could Not Determine	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	5 (100%)	5 (100%)	5 (100%)
<i>% Strengths</i>	3 (60%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)

Three of the cases reviewed had investigations that were initiated in a timely manner. Poor and unacceptable assessments were conducted on three of the five cases reviewed. Three cases were also rated as being inappropriately unfounded. Reasons for inappropriately unfounding the cases included:

- The agency did not follow up with the child, the older brother, or the school in order to confirm how the child was able to get home from school on the day of the incident.
- A forensic interview was indicated by the agency, but the child did not receive one nor did the agency follow-up with the family to ensure it was completed.
- The agency recommended that the reporter be contacted for new information and to continue to make attempts to locate the family; however, there was no documentation to support that this occurred.