

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

This report describes the results of the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) Aiken County Quality Assurance Review, conducted August 12-16, 2013. This report is on one of four innovation counties identified in the Program Improvement Plan (PIP). Data from this review will be combined with other innovation counties and reported as part of the quarterly reporting process described in the PIP.

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 Children are, First and Foremost, Protected from Abuse and Neglect	82% (14)	12% (2)	6% (1)
Safety 2 Children are Safely Maintained in their Homes whenever Possible and Appropriate	53% (16)	13% (4)	34% (10)
Permanency 1 Children have Permanency and Stability in their Living Situations	47% (7)	53% (8)	0% (0)
Permanency 2 The Continuity of Family Relationships and Connections is Preserved for Children	40% (6)	60% (9)	0% (0)
Well-Being 1 Families have Enhanced Capacity to Provide for their Children’s Needs	40% (12)	50% (15)	10% (3)
Well-Being 2 Children receive Appropriate Services to meet their Educational Needs	64% (9)	7% (1)	29% (4)
Well-Being 3 Children receive Adequate Services to meet their Physical and Mental Health Needs	62% (17)	19% (5)	19% (5)

Thirty cases were reviewed including fifteen foster care and fifteen in-home treatment cases. In addition to the numerical ratings, each review includes written communication to explain contributing reasons for each rating. This documentation along with overall case observations from the reviewers, summary remarks made during debriefing sessions, and external reviewer

observations are analyzed and a summary of this analysis is included in each outcome result section of this report.

Onsite Review Instrument (OSRI) Ratings by Item within Outcome

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*.

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

Two *items* are included under Safety Outcome 1. Ratings for the *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.

Item 2: Repeat maltreatment

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

Table 2.

Rating	Item 1	Item 2
<i>Strength</i>	50% (15)	43% (13)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	7% (2)	7% (2)
<i>Not Applicable</i>	43% (13)	50% (15)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	88.2% (15)	86.7% (13)

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>	47% (14)	53% (16)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	30% (9)	47% (14)
<i>Not Applicable</i>	23% (7)	0% (0)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	60.9% (14)	53.3% (16)

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>	17% (5)	20% (6)	43% (13)	20% (6)	10% (3)	0% (0)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	0% (0)	30% (9)	7% (2)	10% (3)	10% (3)	3% (1)
Not Applicable	83% (25)	50% (15)	50% (15)	70% (21)	80% (24)	97% (29)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	100% (5)	40% (6)	86.7% (13)	66.7% (6)	50% (3)	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
<i>Strength</i>	40% (12)	17% (5)	14% (4)	43% (13)	33% (10)	27% (8)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	3% (1)	10% (3)	33% (10)	7% (2)	14% (4)	20% (6)
Not Applicable	57% (17)	73% (22)	53% (16)	50% (15)	53% (16)	53% (16)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	92.3% (12)	62.5% (5)	28.6% (4)	86.7% (13)	71.4% (10)	57.1% (8)

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	43% (13)	64% (19)	80% (24)	54% (16)
Area needing improvement	57% (18)	33% (10)	20% (6)	43% (13)
Not Applicable	0% (0)	3% (1)	0% (0)	3% (1)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)
% Strengths	43.3% (13)	65.5% (19)	80% (24)	55.2% (16)

Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive Appropriate Services to meet their Educational Needs

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

Item 21: Educational needs of child

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

Table 7.

Rating	Item 21
Strength	30% (9)
Area needing improvement	17% (5)
Not Applicable	53% (16)
Total	100% (30)
% Strengths	64.3% (9)

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	53% (16)	50% (15)
Area needing improvement	27% (8)	17% (5)
Not Applicable	20% (6)	33% (10)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)
% Strengths	66.7% (16)	75% (15)

ORSI Ratings by Item within Outcome Summary

Several positives were found with the cases. *Item 5* was identified as a *strength* of the agency; all of the cases reviewed were rated as *strengths* with no *area needing improvement* (ANI). This means that for the cases reviewed, no children returned to foster care during the PUR (5). Additionally, one foster care case and four family preservation cases had all applicable *items* rated as *strength*; no *items* were rated as *area needing improvement*. Another foster care case and one family preservation case had only one item rated as *area needing improvement*.

Reviewers identified several concerns. Two family preservation cases had only two *items* rated as *strength* and another family preservation case had only three *items* rated as *strength*. *Item 13* had ten of fourteen applicable cases rated as *area needing improvement*.