

South Carolina Department of Social Services
Child Welfare Quality Assurance Review: Chester County
Summary Report

This summary report describes the results of the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) Chester County Quality Assurance Review, conducted March 31 – April 4, 2014.

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. Twenty cases were reviewed including 10 foster care and 10 family preservation 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> | 50% (6) | 42% (5) | 8% (1) |
| Safety 2 <i>Children are Safely Maintained in their Homes whenever Possible and Appropriate</i> | 30% (6) | 10% (2) | 60% (12) |
| Permanency 1 <i>Children have Permanency and Stability in their Living Situations</i> | 40% (4) | 60% (6) | 0% (0) |
| Permanency 2 <i>The Continuity of Family Relationships and Connections is Preserved for Children</i> | 30% (3) | 70% (7) | 0% (0) |
| Well-Being 1 <i>Families have Enhanced Capacity to Provide for their Children's Needs</i> | 15% (3) | 45% (9) | 40% (8) |
| Well-Being 2 <i>Children receive Appropriate Services to meet their Educational Needs</i> | 55% (6) | 0% (0) | 45% (5) |
| Well-Being 3 <i>Children receive Adequate Services to meet their Physical and Mental Health Needs</i> | 10% (2) | 16% (3) | 74% (14) |

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*.

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> | 25% (5) | 55% (11) |
| <i>Area needing improvement</i> | 30% (6) | 5% (1) |
| <i>Not Applicable</i> | 45% (9) | 40% (8) |
| Total | 100% (20) | 100% (20) |
| <i>% Strengths</i> | 45.5% (5) | 91.7% (11) |

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> | 25% (5) | 30% (6) |
| <i>Area needing improvement</i> | 45% (9) | 70% (14) |
| <i>Not Applicable</i> | 30% (6) | 0% (0) |
| Total | 100% (20) | 100% (20) |
| <i>% Strengths</i> | 35.7% (5) | 30% (6) |

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 | 20% (4) | 40% (8) | 35% (7) | 15% (3) | 10% (2) | 5% (1) |
| Area needing improvement | 0% (0) | 10% (2) | 15% (3) | 15% (3) | 20% (4) | 0% (0) |
| Not Applicable | 80% (16) | 50% (10) | 50% (10) | 70% (14) | 70% (14) | 95% (19) |
| Total | 100% (20) | 100% (20) | 100% (20) | 100% (20) | 100% (20) | 100% (20) |
| % Strengths | 100% (4) | 80% (8) | 70% (7) | 50% (3) | 33.3% (2) | 100% (1) |

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% (8) | 30% (6) | 20% (4) | 40% (8) | 15% (3) | 15% (3) |
| <i>Area needing improvement</i> | 0% (0) | 5% (1) | 25% (5) | 10% (2) | 30% (6) | 25% (5) |
| Not Applicable | 60% (12) | 65% (13) | 55% (11) | 50% (10) | 55% (11) | 60% (12) |
| Total | 100% (20) | 100% (20) | 100% (20) | 100% (20) | 100% (20) | 100% (20) |
| <i>% Strengths</i> | 100% (8) | 85.7% (6) | 44.4% (4) | 80% (8) | 33.3% (3) | 37.5% (3) |

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 |
|---------------------------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| <i>Strength</i> | 20% (4) | 20% (4) | 55% (11) | 0% (0) |
| <i>Area needing improvement</i> | 80% (16) | 75% (15) | 45% (9) | 85% (17) |
| Not Applicable | 0% (0) | 5% (1) | 0% (0) | 15% (3) |
| Total | 100% (20) | 100% (20) | 100% (20) | 100% (20) |
| <i>% Strengths</i> | 20% (4) | 21.1% (4) | 55% (11) | 0% (0) |

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> | 30% (6) |
| <i>Area needing improvement</i> | 25% (5) |
| Not Applicable | 45% (9) |
| Total | 100% (20) |
| <i>% Strengths</i> | 54.5% (6) |

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> | 10% (2) | 25% (5) |
| <i>Area needing improvement</i> | 70% (14) | 35% (7) |
| Not Applicable | 20% (4) | 40% (8) |
| Total | 100% (30) | 100% (20) |
| <i>% Strengths</i> | 12.5% (2) | 41.7% (5) |

SECTION II: FOSTER HOME LICENSE REVIEW

As part of the Quality Assurance Review Process Chester County, eight Foster Home Licenses were selected from the list of all the licenses issued for the county during the period under review, which was all of the licenses for the county during the PUR. These licenses were reviewed using the *South Carolina Department of Social Services Quality Assurance Foster License Review Instrument*. This instrument consists of three sections. The first section focuses on the issuance of the Initial/Standard License. The second section focuses on the standard license renewal process. The final section focuses on deficiencies, namely agency oversight, data entry, and qualitative issues. Deficiencies noted in this section may not invalidate the license but still require attention and correction by county management. Each section of the instrument includes the appropriate agency, state, and federal requirements.

The criteria for Foster Home License review findings include the following *items*:

- information related to firearms and ammunition in the house
- pet vaccination information
- background checks
- convictions
- required trainings
- annual firearms location update
- fire inspections/re-inspections
- a review of any conflicts noted between file documents and CAPSS
- convictions
- training hours
- medical reports
- 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

The following criteria define the possible *deficiencies* found in Initial and Renewal cases:

- a review of the initial background checks
- updated home studies
- discipline agreements
- fire drills
- quarterly home visits
- disaster preparedness plans
- annual firearms location update
- information concerning the alternative caregivers
- discipline agreements
- disaster preparedness plans
- alternative caregiver forms
- applications
- autobiography information
- financial information
- child factor's checklists
- initial home assessment studies
- references

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.

Foster Home Licensing Findings for Chester County

Initial License Cases. No foster care issuances for initial/standard license were reviewed.

Renewal License Cases. Seven of eight cases reviewed were rated as *ANI* because all of the licensing requirements were not met prior to authorization of the license renewal. Issues identified that led to the rating of *ANI* for seven cases include:

Table 9. Summary of Ratings for Sections One and Two

| Rating | Section One: Initial | Section Two: Renewal |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Strength</i> | N/A | 1 (12.5%) |
| <i>Area needing improvement</i> | N/A | 7 (87.5%) |
| Total | N/A | 8 (100%) |
| <i>% Strengths</i> | N/A | 1 (12.5%) |

Background Checks:

- Central registry, SLED, sex offender registry checks, and/or FBI checks for all applicable individuals, including age appropriate foster and biological children, were not completed, were not current, or were completed in an untimely manner.

Medical Records:

- Medical statements for all family members were not located in the file.

Training:

- The required 28 hours of training were not completed or could not be verified.

Fire Safety:

- All annual fire inspections were not conducted or not documented in the file.

Pet Vaccination Records:

- Pet vaccinations were not on file.

Deficiencies found in Initial and Renewal Cases. Deficiencies were noted for all eight files reviewed. Issues identified by the reviewers include:

Initial Case Deficiencies

No foster care issuances for initial/standard license were reviewed.

Renewal Case Deficiencies

Alternative Caregivers:

- An alternative caregiver/babysitter was not identified.

Fire Drills:

- Records did not include verification that fire drills were conducted regularly.
- Records did not include verification that fire drills were conducted within 24 hours of a child's placement.

Documentation:

- Documentation for quarterly home visits was not located in the case file.
- The current license was not located in the licensing record.

Safety:

- All Discipline Agreements were not located in the case file or were not signed.
- Quarterly home visits were untimely or not completed at all.

- All Disaster Preparedness Plans were either not dated or not located in the case file.

SECTION III: CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICE NO ACTION REPORTS REVIEW

A review of ten no action reports was completed to determine whether no action was taken on the reports according to agency policy and procedures. The reports were randomly selected from the list of reports on which no action was taken by the county during the period under review. The *South Carolina Department of Social Services Quality Assurance Review No Action Reports Instrument* was used to conduct the review. This instrument includes a description of the allegation and eleven questions regarding the no action decisions and processes (see Table 10).

Table 10. Summary of Item Ratings for No Action Reports Review

| | Yes | No | NA | Total |
|--|-----|----|----|-------|
| 1. Illegal substance use alleged AND reason for safety threatened with harm | 2 | 8 | 0 | 10 |
| 2. Use of CAPSS and/or other systems for prior involvement | 9 | 1 | 0 | 10 |
| 3a. Maltreatment tab in CAPSS completed | 8 | 2 | 0 | 10 |
| 3b. Explanation given why allegation did not meet legal definition of maltreatment | 0 | 9 | 1 | 10 |
| 4. Safety factors documented on Intake Assessment not discovered by intake worker | 2 | 8 | 0 | 10 |
| 5. Assessment made utilizing SCDSS Risk Matrix | 9 | 1 | 0 | 10 |
| 6a. Risk Matrix results included statements contradictory to allegation | 6 | 4 | 0 | 10 |
| 6b. Risk Matrix results failed to include all statements that support allegation | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 |
| 7. Contact with necessary collaterals prior to screen-out decision | 4 | 2 | 4 | 10 |
| 8. Another intake referral on same perpetrator and/or child within 12 months | 3 | 7 | 0 | 10 |
| 9. Intake Supervisor ensured consultation with another supervisory-level authority | 0 | 3 | 7 | 10 |

*Note: A single case may have more than one issue identified.

The percentage of *strengths* is also calculated for the cases reviewed. 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 No Action Reports Review

| Rating | Was this case screened-out according to agency policy? |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <i>Strength</i> | 2 (20%) |
| <i>Area needing improvement</i> | 8 (80%) |
| Total | 10 (100%) |
| <i>% Strengths</i> | 2 (20%) |

Eight of ten cases were inappropriately deemed to be no action per agency policy and procedure. Issues identified that led to the rating of *ANI* include:

- An intake assessment could not be located.
- A thorough inquiry of the family’s history was not made.
- The results of the Risk Matrix included statements contradictory to the allegations made and/or information in CAPSS.
- The Risk Matrix did not include information regarding the family’s history with the agency.
- The agency indicated that the allegation met the legal definition of maltreatment but failed to accept the report.
- Safety factors were not documented and/or the agency failed to select those which related to the intake report/allegation.
- All appropriate collateral contacts were not made.

SECTION IV: CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES UNFOUNDED REPORTS REVIEW

Five unfounded reports were reviewed to determine whether the reports were unfounded in accordance with agency policy and procedure. 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 *South Carolina Department of Social Services Quality Assurance Review Unfounded Report Instrument*. This instrument includes a description of the allegation and items regarding three primary areas (see Table 12):

- Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment,
- Repeat maltreatment, and
- Risk assessment and safety management.

Table 12. Summary of Item Ratings for Unfounded Review

| | Yes | No | N/A | Total |
|--|-----|----|-----|-------|
| 1A. Investigation not initiated in accordance with timeframes and requirements | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| 1B. Face-to-face contact not made in accordance with timeframes and requirements | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| 1C. Delays in investigation initiation or face-to-face contact beyond control of agency | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 |
| 2A. At least one substantiated or indicated maltreatment report | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| 2B. One substantiated or indicated maltreatment report within six months before or after | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 |
| 2C. Repeat maltreatment involving the same or similar circumstances | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 |
| 3A. Initial assessment of risk to the children and family in the home | 4 | 1 | 0 | 5 |
| 3B. Ongoing assessment(s) of risk to the children and family in the home | 2 | 3 | 0 | 5 |
| 3C. Safety concerns that were not adequately or appropriately addressed by the agency | 2 | 3 | 0 | 5 |

*Note: A single case may have more than one issue identified.

The percentage of *strengths* is calculated for each decision to unfound. 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 Review

| Rating | Were cases unfounded according to agency policy? |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <i>Strength</i> | 1 (20%) |
| <i>Area needing improvement</i> | 4 (80%) |
| Total | 5 (100%) |
| <i>% Strengths</i> | 1 (20%) |

Reasons that four unfounded cases reviewed violated agency policy and procedures include:

- Risk assessments with children in the home were not adequate or were not ongoing.
- Formal risk and safety assessments were not conducted using the CFASP.
- The agency failed to formulate and implement a safety plan to address safety concerns.
- The agency failed to thoroughly document the safety plan in the case file.
- There was no documentation to support that the agency ensured that children received appropriate services (e.g., forensic interviews).
- The agency failed to make contact with all appropriate collateral contacts.
- Background checks were not conducted.
- Medical and dental records were not located in the case file.
- The agency failed to discuss with families the issues which warranted agency involvement.