

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

This report describes the results of the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) Lexington County Quality Assurance Review, conducted October 21-24, 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>	45% (5)	55% (6)	0% (0)
Safety 2 <i>Children are Safely Maintained in their Homes whenever Possible and Appropriate</i>	37% (11)	20% (6)	43% (13)
Permanency 1 <i>Children have Permanency and Stability in their Living Situations</i>	13% (2)	87% (13)	0% (0)
Permanency 2 <i>The Continuity of Family Relationships and Connections is Preserved for Children</i>	64% (9)	22% (3)	14% (2)
Well-Being 1 <i>Families have Enhanced Capacity to Provide for their Children's Needs</i>	13% (4)	47% (14)	40% (12)
Well-Being 2 <i>Children receive Appropriate Services to meet their Educational Needs</i>	77% (10)	15% (2)	8% (1)
Well-Being 3 <i>Children receive Adequate Services to meet their Physical and Mental Health Needs</i>	12% (3)	38% (10)	50% (13)

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 15 foster care and 15 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>	20% (6)	30% (9)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	13% (4)	7% (2)
<i>Not Applicable</i>	67% (20)	63% (19)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	60% (6)	81.8% (9)

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>	33% (10)	43% (13)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	47% (14)	57% (17)
<i>Not Applicable</i>	20% (6)	0% (0)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	41.7% (10)	43.3% (13)

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	23% (7)	33% (10)	27% (8)	3% (1)	13% (4)	3% (1)
Area needing improvement	3% (1)	17% (5)	23% (7)	27% (8)	17% (5)	0% (0)
Not Applicable	74% (22)	50% (15)	50% (15)	70% (21)	70% (21)	97% (29)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)
% Strengths	87.5% (7)	66.7% (10)	53.3% (8)	11.1% (1)	44.4% (4)	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>	30% (9)	27% (8)	23% (7)	37% (11)	30% (9)	13% (4)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	7% (2)	0% (0)	17% (5)	10% (3)	17% (5)	27% (8)
Not Applicable	63% (19)	73% (22)	60% (18)	53% (16)	53% (16)	60% (18)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	81.8% (9)	100% (8)	58.3% (7)	78.6% (11)	64.3% (9)	33.3% (4)

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	20% (6)	27% (8)	50% (15)	20% (6)
Area needing improvement	80% (24)	73% (22)	50% (15)	70% (21)
Not Applicable	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	10% (3)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)
% Strengths	20% (6)	26.7% (8)	50% (15)	22.2% (6)

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	33% (10)
Area needing improvement	10% (3)
Not Applicable	57% (17)
Total	100% (30)
% Strengths	76.9% (10)

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>	17% (5)	30% (9)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	60% (18)	30% (9)
Not Applicable	23% (7)	40% (12)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	21.7% (5)	50% (9)

SUMMARY

Several positives were found with the cases. *Items* 10 and 12 were identified as *strengths* 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, the agency made efforts to ensure that youth with a permanency goal of APPLA were adequately prepared to transition (10) and concerted efforts were made to ensure that siblings were placed together unless a separation was necessary (12). Additionally, one foster care case had only one applicable *item* rated as ANI. Another foster care case and one family preservation case had only two applicable *items* rated as ANI.

Reviewers identified several concerns. Four family preservation cases had no *items* rated as *strength*, four family preservation cases had only one *item* rated as *strength*, and another three family preservation cases had only two *items* rates as *strength*. *Item* 8 had eight of nine applicable cases rated as ANI, *Item* 17 had 24 of 30 applicable cases rated as ANI, *Item* 18 had 22 of 30 applicable cases rated as ANI, *Item* 20 had 21 of 27 applicable cases rated as ANI, and *Item* 22 had 18 of 23 applicable cases rated as ANI.

SECTION II: FOSTER CARE LICENSE REVIEW

As part of the Quality Assurance Review Process in Lexington County, ten Foster Home Licenses were randomly selected from the list of all licenses issued for the county during the period under review. These licenses were reviewed using the *South Carolina Department of Social Services Quality Assurance 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
- 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 are noted in Table 9.

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

Safety:

- Documentation regarding an in-ground pool was unclear and the record did not contain verification that guidelines regarding pools were reviewed.

Firearms:

- Records did not include verification that ammunition was stored separately from firearms.

Pet Vaccination Records:

- Up-to-date pet vaccinations were not completed prior to licensure or were not on record.

Section Two. None of the eight cases reviewed were rated as *strength* because not 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 all eight cases include:

Table 9. Summary of Ratings for Sections One and Two

Rating	Section One: Initial	Section Two: Renewal
<i>Strength</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	2 (100%)	8 (100%)
Total	2 (100%)	8 (100%)
% <i>Strengths</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Background Checks:

- Central registry, SLED, sex offender registry checks, and/or FBI checks were not completed or completed in an untimely manner.
- A CPS check was not completed on a foster father.
- Central registry checks were not being completed annually.

Training:

- The required 28 hours of training were not completed or could not be verified.
- The Individualized/Personalized Instructions Documentation form was not signed by the professional conducting the training or was in the file with no name.

Pet Vaccination Records:

- Pet vaccinations were not up-to-date or not on file.

Section Three. Deficiencies were noted for nine of the ten files reviewed. Deficiencies noted in Section Three may not invalidate the license but still require attention and correction by county management. Issues identified by the reviewers include:

Alternative Caregivers:

- An alternative caregiver/babysitter was not identified.

Fire Drills:

- Records did not include verification that fire drills were conducted regularly.

Safety:

- The discipline agreement was not signed or was not completed annually.
- Quarterly home visits were untimely or not completed at all.
- Disaster plans were not signed and/or not up-to-date.

Documentation:

- The file contained only two reference letters for the foster parent's paramour.
- The file did not contain a re-licensure assessment prior to the issuance of the current license.
- There was a discrepancy in CAPSS regarding the number of children on a license.
- The relicensure assessment was not signed or dated.

SECTION III: CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICE SCREEN-OUT REVIEW

A review of ten screened-out allegations was completed to determine whether the reports were screened out according to agency policy. The reports were randomly selected from the list of reports screened out by the county during the period under review. The *South Carolina Department of Social Services Quality Assurance Review Screen-Out Report Instrument* was used to conduct the review. This instrument includes a description of the allegation and seven questions regarding the screened-out decisions and processes (see Table 10).

Table 10. Summary of Item Ratings for Screen-Out Review

	Yes	No	NA	Total
1. Illegal substance use alleged AND reason for safety threatened with harm	0	10	0	10
2. Use of CAPSS and/or other systems for prior involvement	10	0	0	10
3. Maltreatment tab in CAPSS completed	0	10	0	10
4. Contact with necessary collaterals prior to screen-out decision	3	0	7	10
5. Another intake referral on same perpetrator and/or child within 12 months	1	9	0	10
6. Intake Supervisor ensured consultation with another supervisory-level authority	0	1	9	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 Screen-Outs Review

Rating	Was this case screened-out according to agency policy?
<i>Strength</i>	0(0%)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	10 (100%)
Total	10 (100%)
<i>% Strengths</i>	0 (0%)

All ten cases were determined to be screened-out in violation of agency policy. Issues identified that led to the rating of *ANI* include:

- The Maltreatment tab in CAPSS was not thoroughly completed, and no explanation was provided.
- There was no documentation to indicate that a supervisor consulted with another supervisory-level individual, when appropriate, prior to making the decision to screen out.
- VCM notified the agency that the family could not be located, but there was no documentation indicating reasonable/sufficient efforts to locate the family.

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. 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	1	4	0	5
1B. Face-to-face contact not made in accordance with timeframes and requirements	1	4	0	5
1C. Delays in investigation initiation or face-to-face contact beyond control of agency	0	1	4	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	5	0	0	5
3B. Ongoing assessment(s) of risk to the children and family in the home	4	1	0	5
3C. Safety concerns that were not adequately or appropriately addressed by the agency	3	2	0	5

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

The percentage of *strengths* is also 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>	2 (40%)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	3 (60%)
Total	5 (100%)
<i>% Strengths</i>	2 (40%)

Reasons that three unfounded cases reviewed violated agency policy include:

- The agency failed to make concerted efforts to conduct a quality assessment of the family, including ongoing assessments of the father and paternal grandmother. Initial contact was not made within the assigned timeframe. The child disclosed that her father had punched her in the face with a closed fist and she did not feel safe at home. Collateral contact with the child's teacher corroborated the child's story when he stated he observed the child to have a swollen eye and cut lip. Only one contact was made with the father and paternal grandmother with no final contact made prior to closure of the investigation. The father reported to the agency that he had attempted to physically discipline the child by hitting her on her leg, at which point she fell on her knees and his hand hit her head. The father denied intentionally hitting the child. The agency failed to discuss the alleged incident with

the grandmother. Furthermore, the father indicated that the child was prescribed medication but was not taking it as prescribed.

- The agency unfounded a case involving corporal punishment. During the initial investigation, the child disclosed that she was spanked with a fly swatter as punishment for bad grades. The agency observed the child's face to be swollen and have a scratch. The child stated that, when she was spanked, the mother used the fly swatter all over her body. The mother admitted to using a fly swatter for punishment on the child's legs, stating that she did not recall hitting the child on the face, but it was possible that the child had moved during the spanking.
- The agency unfounded a case involving a sexual abuse allegation and failed to complete thorough ongoing assessments of sexual abuse of the child. During a forensic interview, the child disclosed that the father had touched her inappropriately. According to agency documentation, the forensic interviewer stated that it was possible that the touch the child reported was a wipe while cleaning the child and the child misunderstood. This was not located in the reviewer's report. The child was seen at a medical center, assessed, and discharged with a diagnosis of sexual assault. The child affirmed allegations of sexual abuse at the appointment at the Assessment and Resource Center stating her father had touched her inappropriately because she was a bad girl and that it had hurt. The agency was prevented from making contact with the father by the attorney, who refused an interview and assessment of the father. The attorney informed the agency that the father did not change the child's diaper. The agency did not make all collateral contacts given their failure to contact the paternal grandmother, the individual responsible for caring for the child and in whose home the child was visiting with the father.