

**Richland County DSS  
Child Welfare Services Review  
March 2004**

During the week of March 22 thru 26, 2004 a team of six DSS staff from state office, Sumter County DSS and Lexington MTS conducted an on-site review of child welfare services in Richland County.

**Period included in Case Record Review: Oct 1, 2003 to Mar 25, 2004**

**Period included in Outcome Measures: Jan 1, 2003 to Dec 31, 2003**

**Purpose**

The Department of Social Services engages in a review of child welfare services in each county to:

- a) Determine to what degree services are delivered in compliance with federal and state laws and agency policy; and
- b) Assess the outcomes for children and families engaged in the child welfare system.

State law (sec 43-1-115) states, in part:

The state department shall conduct, at least once every five years, a substantive quality review of the child protective services and foster care programs in each county and each adoption office in the State. The county's performance must be assessed with reference to specific outcome measures published in advance by the department.

The information obtained by the child welfare services review process will:

- a) Give county staff feedback on the effectiveness of their interventions.
- b) Direct state office technical assistance staff to assist county staff with their areas needing improvement.
- c) Inform agency administrators of which systemic factors impair county staff's ability to achieve specific outcomes.
- d) Direct training staff to provide training for county staff specific to their needs.

**Quantitative and Qualitative Data Sources**

The county-specific review of child welfare services is both quantitative and qualitative.

The review is **quantitative** because it begins with an analysis of every child welfare outcome report for that county for the period under review. The outcome reports reflect the performance of the county in all areas of the child welfare program: CPS Intake, CPS Investigations, CPS In-Home Treatment, Foster Care, Foster Home Licensing, Managed Treatment Services (MTS), and Adoptions.

The review is **qualitative** because it includes an analysis of information obtained from agency clients, staff and stakeholders. Client and stakeholder information is obtained by focus groups, interviews and surveys. The questions posed to clients and stakeholders are designed to illicit information about the quality of the services rendered and the effectiveness of those services.

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Section One

<b>Safety Outcome 1:</b> Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect				
<b>Site Visit Findings</b>				
	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	Not Applicable
Foster Care	7	1	1	1
CPS Treatment	10			

Measure: <b>Timeliness of initiating investigations</b> on reports of child maltreatment High Risk = 0 to 2 hrs. Medium Risk = 2 to 12 hrs. Low Risk = 12 to 24 hrs.* Data Time Period: 12/1/02 to 11/30/03				
	Number of Reports Accepted	Number of Investigations Initiated Timely	Number of Investigations Met Objective >= 99.44%	Number of Investigations Above (Below) Objective
State	18,177	18,144	18,075	68.79
Richland	1,332	1,332	1,325	7.46

Note: This standard is based on DSS policy. It is not a federally established objective.

Measure: <b>Recurrence of Maltreatment</b> – Of all children who were victims of indicated reports of child abuse and/or neglect during the reporting period, the percent having another indicated report within a subsequent 6 month period.  Indicated Rept Between Jun 1, 2002 and May 31, 2003 Subsequent Indicated report on or before Nov 30, 2003				
	Number of Child Victims	Number of Child Victims In Another Founded Rept	Number of Children Met Objective >= 93.90%*	Number of Children Above (Below) Objective
State	9,910	88	9,305.49	516.51
Richland	708	8	664.81	35.19

Note: This is a federally established objective.

Analysis

**Safety outcome #1 was substantially achieved** as indicated by both site visit findings and outcome reports. Richland County DSS achieved a perfect score on Timeliness of Investigations for all 1,332 cases investigated during the year captured by the outcome report. The outcome report captures only those cases outside of the 24 hour limit for investigations. The onsite review was able to look at cases in greater detail – **high risk** case investigations initiated outside of the 0 to 2 hour time limit, **medium risk** case investigations initiated outside of the 2 to 12 hour time limit, and **low risk** case

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investigations initiated outside of the 12 to 24 hour time limit. Even at that level of scrutiny, Richland County DSS achieved a perfect score.

There were 8 incidents of repeat maltreatment during the period under review. This represents 1.1% of substantiated cases. Consequently, Richland County met the federally established standard of  $\geq 93.90\%$ .

**Section Two**

<b>Safety Outcome 2:</b> Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.				
<b>Site Visit Findings</b>				
	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	Not Applicable
Foster Care	4	1		5
CPS Treatment	4	3	3	

Measure: <b>Risk of harm to child</b> – Of all unfounded investigations during the reporting period, the percent receiving subsequent reports within six months of the initial report.				
	Number Alleged Child Victims in an Unfounded Rept 6/1/02 to 5/31/03	Number With Another Rept Within 6 Months of Unfounded Determination	Number of Cases Met Objective $\geq 93.90\%*$	Number of Cases Above (Below) Objective
State	15,847	1,534	14,880.33	(567.33)
Richland	1,135	89	1,065.77	(19.76)

Note: This is a DSS established objective.

Analysis

**Safety outcome #2 was partially achieved.** The outcome measure “Risk of harm to child” is a proxy measure because it counts the additional reports made on unfounded investigations. Those additional reports may or may not indicate continued risk to a child. To meet this agency established standard Richland DSS could receive another report on no more than 69 of its unfounded cases. Richland did not meet the standard because it received another report on 89 of its unfounded cases.

One of the 10 foster care and 6 of the 10 CPS Treatment cases reviewed during the site visit were rated as either Partially or Not Achieved for this item. The weakness is in reducing the risk of harm in Treatment cases due to parents’ partial or non-compliance with treatment plan. Examples observed during the site visit included a) only one of two drug addicted parents complying with treatment, although both parents remain in the

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home, b) child with behavior disorder receiving treatment, while parent found to have caused the abuse was not in treatment.

Section Three

<b>Permanency Outcome 1:</b> Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.				
<b>Site Visit Findings</b>				
	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	Not Applicable
Foster Care	7			3
CPS Treatment				X

Measure: <b>Foster Care Re-entries</b> – Of all children who entered care during the year under review, the percent that re-entered foster care Within 12 months of a prior foster care episode.				
	Number Children Entering Care 12/1/02 to 11/30/03	Number That Were Returned Home Within The Past 12 Months From Previous Fos Care Episode	Number of Children Objective >= 91.40%*	Number of Children Above (Below) Objective
State	3,299	316	3,015.29	(32.29)
Richland	277	21	253.18	2.82

Note: This is a federally established objective.

**Explanation**

**This is a strength for Richland County.** Of the 277 children who entered care in Richland County during the period under review, 21 children had been returned home in the prior 12 months. Those 21 children are **Re-entries**. To meet the federal objective, no more than 24 of the 277 children could be re-entries. These numbers mirror the findings of the onsite review team.

It should be noted that Richland County’s excellent performance in this area is largely a factor of the limitations posed by the period under review. Several stakeholders and the DSS attorney stated that re-entries account for a large percentage of the children entering foster care. However, they are cases that were closed more than a year ago. The stakeholders stated that most of the re-entries are from children placed with relatives.

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Measure: <b>Stability of Foster Care Placement</b> – Of all children who have been in foster care less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal from home, the percent that had not more than 2 placement settings.				
	Number of Children In Care Less Than 12 Months	Number of Children With No More Than 2 Placements	Number of Children Objective $\geq 86.70\%*$	Number of Children Above (Below) Objective
State	3,860	3,025	3,346.62	(321.62)
Richland	301	228	260.97	(32.97)

Note: This is a federally established objective.

Stability of Placement	Site Visit Findings			
	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	Not Applicable
Foster Care	10			
CPS Treatment				X

**Explanation**

**This is an area needing improvement.** To meet this standard at least 261 of the 301 children in care less than 12 months would experience 2 or fewer placements. Instead, only 228 children experienced 2 or fewer placements. The remaining 73 children experienced more than 2 placements, 33 more children than the standard allows. In other words, 24% of children in care less than 12 months are moved at least twice.

The numbers from the outcome report indicate that Richland County did not meet the federal objective for this item. However, every case reviewed during the site visit was rated a strength. The Onsite Review Instrument directed reviewers to determine if children were moving due to disruptions (unplanned moves), or for clinically appropriate reasons (ex. moved to a lower level of care, moved to a licensed relative's home, moved into placement with siblings, etc.). The cases reviewed either had less than two moves during the period under review, or those with more than two moves were for clinically appropriate reasons.

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<b>Measure: Permanency Goal for Child</b> – Of all children who have been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, the percent for which a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) petition has been filed.				
	Children in Care At Least 15 of Last 22 Months 12/02 – 11/03	Number Children With TPR Complaint	Number of Children Objective >= 45.00%*	Number of Children Above (Below) Objective
State	3,818	1,656	1,718.10	(62.10)
Richland	410	202	184.50	17.50
Columbia Adoptions	92	87	41.40	45.60
Columbia MTS	122	47	54.90	(7.90)

Note: This is DSS established objective. The federal agency, Administration for Children & Families, has not established an objective for this measure.

**Explanation**

**This is a strength for Richland County and its associated DSS offices.** The Columbia Adoption and MTS office numbers are included because those offices manage children from Richland County. To meet this objective 45.00% or more of the children in care 15 of the most recent 22 months must have a TPR petition filed. For the combined offices 53.84% of the children in care 15 of the most recent 22 months had a TPR petition filed. Statewide 43.37% of the children in care 15 of the most recent 22 months had a TPR petition filed. As a state, DSS is not meeting this objective.

<b>Measure: Length of Time to Achieve Reunification</b> – Of all children who were reunified with their parents or caregiver, at the time of discharge from foster care, the percent reunified in less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal from home.				
	Number of Children Where Fos Care Services Closed. Last Plan Was Return Home 12/1/02 – 11/30/03	Number of Children In Care Less Than 12 Months	Number Of Children Objective >= 76.20%*	Number of Children Above (Below) Objective
State	2,253	1,875	1,716.79	158.21
Richland	165	136	125.73	10.27

Note: This is a federally established objective.

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**Explanation**

**This is a strength for Richland County.** To meet this objective 76.20% of the children who entered care during the reporting period must be returned home within a year of entering foster care. Richland County met this objective because 82.42% (136/165) of the children returned home within a year of entering care. Statewide, 83.22% (1,875/2,253) of children entering care are returned home within 12 months of entering care.

Measure: <b>Length of Time to Achieve Adoption</b> – Of all children who exited from foster care during the year under review to a finalized adoption, the percent that exited care in less than 24 months from the time of the latest removal from home.				
	Number of Children With Finalized Adoption 12/1/02 – 11/30/03	Number of Children Where Adoption Was Finalized Within 24 Months of Entering Care	Number of Children Objective $\geq 32.00\%$ *	Number of Children Above (Below) Objective
State	283	41	90.56	(49.56)
Richland	17	1	5.44	(4.44)
Columbia Adoptions	37	4	11.84	(7.84)

Note: This is a federally established objective.

**Explanation**

**This is an area needing improvement.** The Columbia Adoption office numbers are included because that office managed most of the adoption cases originating in Richland County.

To meet this objective 32.00% of the children adopted during the period under review must be adopted within 24 months of entering care. For the combined Columbia Adoptions & Richland County offices 9.26% of the children adopted were adopted within 24 months of entering care – 22.74 percentage points short of the federally established objective. Statewide, 14.49% of children adopted through DSS are adopted within 24 months of entering care.

Stakeholder interviews conducted during the onsite portion of this review give insight into the obstacles that must be overcome for Richland DSS to meet this objective.

- a) Staff and stakeholders state that it takes 3 to 5 years to complete adoptions in Richland County. At permanency planning hearings, judges give parents who are partially compliant with their treatment plan a chance to become fully compliant. It may take several permanency hearings before a judge will approve a change in the permanency plan to TPR & Adoption.
- b) During calendar year 2003, Richland DSS had two full time attorneys for all 300 children in care. TPR's were put on hold.

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- c) Several stakeholders complained that children are not adequately prepared for adoption and are then assessed as not appropriate for adoption. Once assessed as not appropriate, that assessment sticks. Subsequent assessments review the same information and come to the same conclusion.
- d) The delay in the TPR and adoption process causes children to exhibit behavior problems. Those behaviors get documented and reduce the child’s chance of being adopted.

Measure: <b>Permanency Goal of “Other Planned Living Arrangement”</b> – Of all children in foster care, the percent with a permanency goal of emancipation (Indep Liv Services) or a planned permanent living arrangement other than adoption, guardianship, or return to family.				
	Number of Children In Care at Least One Day 12/1/02 – 11/30/03	Number of Children In Care With Perm Plan “Other Than Planned Living Arrangement”	Number of Children Objective $\geq 80.00\%*$	Number of Children Above (Below) Objective
State	8,129	1,121	6,503.20	504.80
Richland	568	104	454.40	9.60

Note: This is a DSS established objective.

Analysis

**Permanency outcome #1 was partially achieved.** Strengths are demonstrated in a) foster care re-entries, b) permanency goal for child, and c) Reunification, or permanent placement with relatives, and d) permanency goal of “other planned living arrangement. Areas needing improvement include a) stability of placement, and b) length of time to achieve adoption.

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Section Four

<b>Permanency Outcome 2:</b> The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.				
<b>Site Visit Findings</b>				
	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	Not Applicable
Foster Care	3	5		2
CPS Treatment				X

Measure: <b>Proximity of Foster Care Placement</b> – Of all children in foster care during the reporting period (excluding MTS and Adoptions children), the percent placed within their county of origin.					
	Number of Children In Care 12/1/02 – 11/30/03	Number of Children Placed Within County of Origin	Percent of Children Placed Within County of Origin	Number of Children Objective >= 70.00%*	Number of Children Above (Below) Objective
State	6,174	4,757	72.68	4,321.80	435.20
Richland	569	458	57.65	398.30	59.70

Note: This is a DSS established objective.

**Explanation**

To meet this objective 70.00% of the children (or 398.30 children) in care must be placed in Richland County. **This is a strength for Richland DSS** because 80.49% of the children (458 children) are placed within the county.

<b>Site Visit Findings</b>			
	Strength	Area Needing Improvement	Not Applicable
Placement with siblings	4	2	4

**Explanation**

**This is a strength for Richland County.** Of the 10 foster care cases reviewed during the site visit, 4 children had no sibling. It appears that every effort is made to place siblings together when appropriate. **However**, one area of concern noted by reviewers is when children are placed in therapeutic foster care apart from their siblings due to behavioral or emotional problems. When, as a result of the therapeutic environment, the

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child's behavior improves to the point where that level of care is no longer needed, there is no evidence of attempts to reunite the child with his/her siblings.

<b>Site Visit Findings</b>			
	Strength	Area Needing Improvement	Not Applicable
Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care	2	5	3

**Explanation**

**This is an area needing improvement.** Five of the 10 cases reviewed were rated as an area needing improvement for several reasons, a) visits with parents continued even when mental health, foster parents and others aware that visits were harmful to child, b) failure by agency to recognize when the grandparent was, in the child's eyes, the parent; grandparent visits did not occur; visits with parent occurred.

<b>Site Visit Findings</b>			
	Strength	Area Needing Improvement	Not Applicable
Preserving connections	5	3	2

**Explanation**

**This is an area needing improvement.** This item addresses the agency's ability to preserve a child in foster care's connection to his/her community, family, and faith. Richland DSS staff acknowledged that little to no attempt is made to preserve a child's connection to his/her faith, regardless of the foster child's age. There is little evidence of the agency's attempts to preserve a child in care's relationships with paternal relatives. The matter of preserving a child's connections is generally left to the initiative of foster parents.

<b>Site Visit Findings</b>			
	Strength	Area Needing Improvement	Not Applicable
Relative placement	4	4	2

**Explanation**

**This is an area needing improvement.** This item addresses the agency's effectiveness in identifying and assessing the relatives of children in foster care as possible caregivers. It also addresses the support provided to relatives who care for children involved in the child welfare system. It is evident that Richland DSS staff conduct a thorough search for relatives soon after children come into care. If relatives are found during that initial search, they are generally assessed as placement options. However, on-going search for

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and assessment of relatives is not documented, or not done. The reviewed cases that were deficient in this area generally failed to rule out paternal relatives.

<b>Site Visit Findings</b>			
	Strength	Area Needing Improvement	Not Applicable
Relationship of child in care with parents		6	4

**Explanation**

**This is an area needing improvement.** This item addresses the agency’s effectiveness in promoting or maintaining a strong emotionally supportive relationship between children in care and their parents. The nature and frequency of visits was generally regarded as inadequate by reviewers, and stakeholders. This was especially the case when pre-school aged children in care with a plan of “Return Home” were allowed the minimum of two hours a month visit with their parents. This item received the poorest rating of all 12 Permanency items

**Analysis**

**Permanency outcome #2 was partially achieved.** Strengths related to this outcome include a) proximity of foster care placement, b) placement with siblings. Areas needing improvement are a) visitation, b) placement with siblings, c) placement with relatives, and d) support for relations between children in care with their parents.

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Section Five

<b>Well Being Outcome 1:</b> Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.				
<b>Site Visit Findings</b>				
	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	Not Applicable
Foster Care	7	1		2
CPS Treatment	3	5	2	

Analysis

**Well being outcome #1 was partially achieved.** The three areas evaluated for this outcome are:

- a) The effectiveness of the agency in assessing and providing for the needs of children, their parents, and foster parents;
- b) The children and family involvement in case planning;
- c) Worker visits with children
- d) Worker visits with parent(s)

The effectiveness of the agency in assessing and providing for the needs of children, their parents and foster parents was rated as a **strength in Foster Care cases** and an **area needing improvement in CPS Treatment cases**. In both CPS and foster care cases the needs of children were generally attended. However, in 6 of the 10 CPS cases referrals were made for parents without sufficient follow through to determine if services were actually received and effective.

Involving children and parents in case planning was rated as an **area needing improvement in both CPS and foster care cases**. The most common omission that caused cases to be rated as deficient in this area was the failure to involve fathers in the case planning process. Fathers' signatures do not appear on case plans, even when the father is living in the home. Even when the worker documents knowledge of a non-custodial but supportive father, he is not involved in the case planning.

The Family-To-Family initiative in Richland DSS appears to be addressing the issue of involving all relevant parties in the case planning process. Processes appear to be in place to cause family involvement in the planning process to become standard practice.

Workers are having face-to-face visits with children. This is a **strength** for Richland DSS. It should be noted that face-to-face visits with all children in CPS Treatment cases do not occur every month.

Worker visits with parents is an **area needing improvement**. Visits with parents are occurring, and in many instances the casework practice during those visits is excellent.

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However, cases were rated as deficient when both mother and father were in the home, but visits were only made with the mother. This is more of a problem with CPS Treatment cases than foster care cases. Worker visits with parents appear to occur with less and less frequency the longer a child remains in care.

**Section Six**

<b>Well Being Outcome 2:</b> Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.				
<b>Site Visit Findings</b>				
	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	Not Applicable
Foster Care	7			3
CPS Treatment	3	1		6

Measure: Educational Needs of the Child – Of all children that aged out of foster care, the percent that graduated from high school.				
	Number of Children Aged Out 12/1/02 – 11/30/03	Number Completing 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade or Higher	Number of Children Objective $\geq 90.00\%$ *	Number of Children Above (Below) Objective
State	314	36	282.6	(246.6)
Richland	21	1	18.4	(17.9)
Columbia MTS	8	0	7.2	(7.2)
Columbia Adoptions	2	1	1.8	(0.8)

Note: This is a DSS established objective.

**Analysis**

**Well being outcome # 2 was not achieved.** Of the 31 children who aged out of foster care during the period under review, 2 (6.5%) graduated from high school. To meet the objective for this item 28 children (90%) would have to graduate from high school.

The outcome report measures high school graduation rates. The onsite review of cases determined whether the educational needs of children were being assessed and addressed. The 9 cases rated “Not Applicable” involved pre-school aged children. Of the remaining 11 cases, the agency’s performance was excellent in 10 cases.

Consequently, other factors must be examined to explain the failure of foster children to graduate from high school in Richland County. The impact of long term foster care, and its inherent lack of permanence, on school performance may be a contributing factor.

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Section Seven

<b>Well Being Outcome 3:</b> Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.				
<b>Site Visit Findings</b>				
	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	Not Applicable
Foster Care	6	1	1	2
CPS Treatment	2	2	3	3

Analysis

**Well being outcome #3 was partially achieved.** The two areas evaluated for this outcome are:

- a) Physical health of the child; and
- b) Mental health of the child.

Children in foster care substantially achieved this outcome. Children in CPS Treatment did not. This difference is, in part, due to documentation. Foster care cases generally contain documentation which shows that the physical and mental health needs of children are being addressed. CPS Treatment cases generally do not contain such documentation. Additionally, the mental health worker assigned to Richland DSS is involved in the planning staffings for children in foster care. The same level of resource does not appear to be applied to CPS Treatment cases.

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**Section Seven**

Screened-Out CPS Referrals

<b>Question: Were attempts to report incidences of abuse and/or neglect by the public appropriately screened out?</b>		
<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Cannot Determine</b>
10	0	0

**Analysis**

Richland DSS received 1,476 intakes during the period from 10/1/02 thru 09/30/03. During that period 157 (10.6%) of those intakes were screened out. Statewide, the percent of CPS referrals screened out ranges from a high of 49.3% to a low of 0%. Statewide, the mean for screened out referrals is 24%. Ten of the 157 screened out intakes were reviewed to assess the appropriateness of the screen-out decision. Assessment of the intake decisions was based solely on information documented in CAPSS.

Reviewers found that the rationale for not investigating the referrals was appropriate in all 10 of the referrals reviewed. There is a field in the agency's database in which the intake worker is to enter the rationale for their intake decision. That field is consistently completed by Richland DSS intake staff. The rationale is consistently sound.

Eight of the ten intakes reviewed had been reported to the agency on previous occasions. One of the cases had been reported on five previous occasions. Cases with multiple reports generally had been investigated in the past. There were no instances reviewed of a case with three or more referrals in which all referrals were screened out.

**This is a strength for Richland County DSS.**