

**HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAM QUALITY REVIEW
SPARTANBURG COUNTY DSS
OCTOBER 2001**

The South Carolina Department of Social Services Human Services Division conducted a qualitative review of Spartanburg County DSS in Fall 2001. The review was conducted on site, and consisted of case record reviews, staff interviews, client contacts, and external stakeholder interviews. In this review, the external stakeholders interviewed were foster parents, Department of Juvenile Justice, DHEC Social Workers, Hospital Social Workers, Foster Care Review Board, and the Administrative Family Court Judge.

It must be noted that the review which generated the findings in this section was conducted in October 2001 and sampled case activity from January through September 2001. Since that time, the Agency has implemented a new computer system (CAPSS).

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SAMPLE INFORMATION

Program under review	Referrals Not Accepted As CPS Reports	CPS Investigation	CPS Treat. - Active	CPS Treat. - Closed	Foster Care - Active	Foster Care - Closed	Foster Home Licensing
Period Under Review	7/1/01 - 9/30/01	5/1/01 - 9/30/01	9/30/01	7/1/01 - 9/30/01	9/30/01	7/01/01 - 9/30/01	9/30/01
Case Population for Period Under Review	9	80	124	31	115	45	110
Cases Sampled	9	20	20	15	20	15	20
Cases Reviewed	9	18	20	13	20	13	20

This report is in 3 major sections: the General Findings section outlining strengths and issues which may require action, the Review Summary by Critical Decision Points, and the Measures and Outputs section which applies the review findings to the Agency's Child Welfare Outcomes.

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GENERAL FINDINGS**

The findings below affect the quality of the casework and service delivery either directly or indirectly. They are based on staff interviews, stakeholder interviews, client interviews, case records, and computer system review.

STRENGTHS OF SPARTANBURG COUNTY DSS.

1. Spartanburg DSS management staff have developed a system of meetings and briefings to ensure regular opportunities for discussion of case situations, supervisory input and guidance, and mutual decision making. We found this system particularly effective in CPS Intake and Investigations.
2. External stakeholders view Spartanburg DSS management as a positive force in improving service delivery in the community.
3. Spartanburg DSS is effectively using probe interviewing techniques during intake and is responsive in initiating investigations quickly and taking preliminary actions to ensure child safety.
4. Spartanburg DSS has a close and cooperative working relationship with the Family Court, and Foster Care Review Board.
5. Based on case review and staff interviews, the majority of the foster care cases reviewed were on appropriate grade level, and were experiencing no problems with behavior, substance abuse, or school attendance. The children who were identified as having adjustment problems were receiving counseling.
6. Most children in care in the cases we reviewed experienced from 1 to 3 placements. We found no correlation of number of placements with either time in care or the age of the child in care. Generally these changes were to move children from emergency placements to more stable and permanent placement, or to place siblings together.

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**ISSUES REQUIRING POSSIBLE ACTION IN SPARTANBURG COUNTY
DSS:**

1. While there were extensive schedules for staffing and supervisory involvement, there was not sufficient documentation to determine if assignments were monitored to ensure appropriate followup. The documentation indicated that the focus of the supervisory reviews tended toward evaluation of actions or tasks completed in the case plan rather than evaluating progress of the client and/or family in changing behaviors or circumstances in the cases selected for review.
2. In general, parents and where appropriate children were not directly involved in the development of their case plan. In cases with plans of Independent Living, the child had little input, and the plan was vague, stating "Independent Living Skills" as a goal.
3. The initiation of services after placement or case decision generally took several weeks and increased the time of agency involvement.
4. Direct contacts with clients, while regular with children in foster care, were infrequent with families or in-home treatment cases. In the contacts made, an assessment of the ongoing safety of the children was not documented or formally explored. When caseworkers were interviewed and asked about specific cases, they were generally able to describe ongoing activities and contacts which were not documented. Lack of time was the common reason given for delays in documenting or not documenting activities fully. Several staff work after hours to complete documentation.
5. Documentation of court activity was generally limited to copies of summaries or court orders. Closures were not generally planned with service providers or with clients.
6. The documentation should reflect supervisory input in all critical decision points. The county has a schedule of supervisory meetings already in place. This time should be utilized to discuss and document case decision making, planning and evaluation of progress.

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7. While the quarterly visits with Foster Parents required by regulations were occurring, one of the Foster Parents in two parent homes was often not present. Since the purpose of the Foster Home Licensing quarterly visit is not to monitor the progress of any children in placement but to discuss issues related to Foster Parenting or any problems the Foster Parents may be encountering, there is a gap regarding any issues or problems that the absent Foster Parent may have.

Overall, Spartanburg DSS has a strong base of casework practice and follow through in the CPS Intake and Assessment programs which can be applied to deal with issues of communication, follow through, and direction in the CPS Treatment and Foster Care programs. Spartanburg DSS has developed an operational framework of meetings, staffings, and conferences which provide opportunities to resolve these issues by attending to what transpires in those contacts

REVIEW SUMMARY BY CRITICAL DECISION POINTS

Intake:

In our review of intake files, we found that decisions whether to accept or not accept referrals as CPS reports were generally appropriate. The intake documentation on file addressed probe interviewing by the intake worker and proper and consistent consideration by both the worker and supervisor of the allegations to determine whether or not to investigate. The intake documentation also indicated a regular practice of referral to other agencies where more appropriate services might be obtained.

Dual Track Pilot:

In our case reviews and staff interviews, we found that CPS investigations conducted were thorough, less incident oriented, and more focussed on family needs and dynamics. We found in general that investigative activity took place throughout the period up to the case decision. There were regular contacts with collaterals and the family to update the case circumstances when the case decision staffing was held. Documentation of investigative activities were thorough and addressed risk and safety issues for all family members. The Safety Assessment

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form developed as part of the Dual Track pilot served as a detailed and effective source of documentation. Spartanburg DSS was effective in using the family conference to address concerns and issues with the immediate and extended family members.

Case Decision:

In the majority of investigations reviewed, supervisory review and guidance in the decision making process was documented in case records and stated in staff interviews. Due to the extensive contacts and thorough investigation of allegations, case decisions were appropriate and supported by the evidence documented in the case files or systems.

We did note 3 investigations in which the case decision exceeded 45 days. In all 3 instances, the County Director appropriately approved an extension in writing. The delay in the decision was due to outstanding evaluations and reports from counselors and physicians. All decisions were completed within the 15 day extension granted.

The county was effective in making efforts to notify the parties involved in the investigation of the case decision. Copies of the notification of the case decision addressed to the affected parties were on file with dictation stating that the originals were mailed.

Case Transfer/Transition to Treatment and Foster Care:

Spartanburg DSS has a formal process of transferring cases from Investigations to the Treatment and Foster Care Units. Based on staff interviews and case record documentation, initial contacts by Treatment and Foster Care staff usually occurred within 2 weeks of the transfer staffing.

CPS (In-Home) Treatment/ Foster Care (Out-of-Home):

Assessment and Treatment Planning:

Although the county has regularly scheduled planning conferences for workers and parents to develop Treatment Plans, case documentation did not record such activity. Based on the documents reviewed and interviews with staff, family assessment and case planning for CPS Treatment cases had little input or involvement from the family or affected service providers. Treatment Plans generally did not clearly describe specific tasks, goals, or desired changes in behavior.

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Service Delivery:

Based on case review, we found that while the county was effective in transferring cases from Investigations to CPS Treatment and initial contacts with clients were made within 2 weeks, the actual initiation of services after the case decision in CPS Treatment generally took several weeks and increased the time of agency involvement. With the lack of specificity and limited client involvement in case planning mentioned above, the quality of the plan does not support the delay in developing and initiating services.

While regular contacts were documented for CPS Treatment cases, the ongoing safety of the child(ren) in the home was not assessed. The detail of what transpired in the various activities documented in the system was incomplete or not descriptive.

Evaluation:

Evaluation of ongoing cases tended to focus on completion of activities, and not progress toward goal achievement via changes in behavior and/or circumstances (such as client attending counseling, but no consideration of the impact of counseling on the client's behavior). Supervisory involvement and guidance especially in CPS Treatment cases was limited and documentation generally indicated that supervisory review of actions or plans took place after the action instead of prior to the action. There was no indication of indepth assessment of case progress or adjustment of services to respond to changes in behavior or client circumstances. Lack of time was given as the primary reason for the insufficient documentation of supervisory involvement.

Closure:

CPS Treatment cases which were closed had limited documentation of staffing or case evaluation activity which supported the decision to close. CPS Treatment cases generally were closed without including the child, the family, or service providers in the decision to close or planning the closure of the case.

Foster Care:

Assessment and Treatment Planning:

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Although the county has regularly scheduled planning conferences for workers and parents to develop Placement Plans, case documentation did not record such activity. Based on the documents reviewed and interviews with staff, family assessment and case planning for Foster Care cases had little input or involvement from the family or affected service providers. Placement Plans generally did not clearly describe specific tasks, goals, or desired changes in behavior. For children in foster care with a permanent plan of Independent Living, the Placement Plan stated "Independent Living Skills" with no specific description of what those skills were, how they were to be acquired, and by when. Placement Plans for children in foster care generally did not specifically address the medical, educational, or social needs for the individual child.

Service Delivery:

Based on case review, we found that while the county was effective in transferring cases from Investigations to Foster Care and initial contacts with clients were made within 2 weeks, the actual initiation of services after placement in Foster Care generally took several weeks and increased the time of agency involvement.

While regular contacts were documented for Foster Care cases, the ongoing safety of the child(ren) in care was not assessed. The detail of what transpired in the various activities documented in the system was incomplete or not descriptive.

Based on the Foster Care cases reviewed, children in care experienced between 1 and 3 placement changes on average. The primary reason for placement changes was movement from the Emergency Shelter to a foster home.

Interaction between the Agency and the Foster Care Review Board was documented on the computer system and in case files. In case reviews, we noted documentation that all necessary parties were notified of FCRB hearings. Spartanburg Foster Parents surveyed indicated they were notified of upcoming FCRB hearings and provided the Progress Report required if they could not attend FCRB. The Foster Care Review Board staff interviewed mentioned concerns that Foster Parents did not always attend FCRB hearings and that workers were often not prepared to discuss their cases at the FCRB hearing.

Evaluation:

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Evaluation of ongoing cases tended to focus on completion of activities, and not progress toward goal achievement via changes in behavior and/or circumstances (such as client attending counseling, but no consideration of the impact of counseling on the client's behavior). Supervisory involvement and guidance was limited and documentation generally indicated that supervisory review of actions or plans took place after the action instead of prior to the action.

In Foster Care cases, the primary documentation source for ongoing evaluation was the court summary. We also noted that Foster Care Placement Plans and Case Evaluations were usually photocopied and redated to reflect assessment. There was no indication of indepth assessment of case progress or adjustment of services to respond to changes in behavior or client circumstances. Lack of time was given as the primary reason for the insufficient documentation of supervisory involvement.

Closure:

Foster Care cases which were closed had limited documentation of staffing or case evaluation activity which supported the decision to close. Foster Care cases generally were closed without including the child, the family, or service providers in the decision to close or planning the closure of the case. In Foster Care, we were unable to locate court orders to close the case.

Court Activity Foster Care (Out-of-Home):

Interviews with the Administrative Family Court Judge, Foster Care Review Board, and DSS staff were conducted. DSS caseworkers were considered well-prepared for court. We noted delays in court hearings and documentation of court activity limited to the Court Order

Foster Home Licensing:

Initial Licenses:

Spartanburg DSS conducts the initial visit with the prospective foster family to view the home and establish a relationship with the prospective foster family. In the files reviewed, assessment summaries were thorough and all inspections and background checks were properly completed, with the exception of Sexual Offender Registry checks. In our file review, we noted the lack of

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documentation of Sexual Offender Registry checks for any family members including the prospective Foster Parents.

License Renewal:

Renewals of Foster Home License were consistently completed prior to the expiration of the previous license. Based on file documentation and staff interviews, there was limited consultation with the foster care caseworker at the time of renewal to evaluate the care received by children placed at a particular foster home. Documentation that Sexual Offenders checks were performed was not always found in the case files reviewed. The discussion of age ranges or behaviors acceptable to the Foster Parent for placement in their homes was not generally documented in the licensing files.

Ongoing Activities:

The county has initiated higher standards of contact and follow through with foster parents. Based on documentation in the licensing files, staff interviews, and Foster Parent contacts, this activity is taking place. We did note, however, that both Foster Parents were not seen at the regular Foster Home Licensing monitoring contacts as required by statute. Usually the visit was conducted during the day when 1 Foster Parent (most often the Foster Father) was not at home or available.

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MEASURES AND OUTPUTS**

Outcome 1: Increase permanency for children in Foster Care (Safe and Stable Home for Every Child)

Measure	Source	County		State	
		#	%	#	%
Total Children in Care	SACWIS	165	100%	4862	100%
Children in care more than 12 months	SACWIS	81	49.09%	3052	62.77%
In care more than 12 months where permanency hearing has not been held	SACWIS	16	19.75%	1044	34.21%
Children in care for whom permanency plan has not been achieved within 3/6 months after permanency planning hearing	SACWIS	Report under development			

Summary: While data is not readily available concerning the achievement of permanency plans, the lack of involvement of the family or the child in planning, and a superficial evaluation of case progress are major factors in this outcome. Spartanburg DSS has the structure in place to enable achievement of this outcome, after case evaluation and client participation are addressed.

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Outcome 2: Reduce Time in Foster Care to Adoption

Measure	County		State	
	#	Months	#	Months
Average number of months in foster care until adoption is final	3	34.76	469	46.40
Average number of days/months in foster care after permanency planning hearing approves a plan of TPR or adoption for the child	Report under development			
Average number of days/months in foster care after TPR is granted	Report under development			

Summary: With Adoptions as a separate organizational structure, and with the small number of cases in Spartanburg County, no definitive statement can be made about the county's posture in contributing to the achievement of this outcome.

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Outcome 3: Improve Child Well-Being

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children and adolescents attending school and performing: passing grades, maintaining grade level, school readiness (1 st), truancy, suspensions/expulsions, literacy, diploma/GED, secondary education	In the 17 cases reviewed where Foster Children were in school, we found that all were on grade level, were attending school and exhibiting no attendance or behavior problems.			
Number and percentage of children and adolescents who show physical and mental health is stable or improving (therapy, screenings)	In the 20 cases reviewed, we found that 7(70%) of the 10 children identified with mental health or adjustment issues were actively receiving therapy or counseling.			
Number and percentage of children with substance abuse are stable or improving	In the 20 cases reviewed, we found no children identified with substance abuse issues.			
Number and percentage of runaways	3	1.82%	95	1.95%
Number and percentage who age out of foster care and failed to meet goals	Report under development			
Number and percentage who become pregnant	From case file review and caseworker interviews, we noted 1 instance of a foster child fathering a child, but no foster children becoming pregnant.			
Number and percentage who are adjudicated for delinquency: once, more than once.	In the 20 cases reviewed, we found that 3(15%) children were involved with delinquency issues.			

Summary: Based on case reviews, children in foster care in Spartanburg are generally experiencing few problems with school, behavior, or substance abuse. The Independent Living cases reviewed did not document a realistic case plan to prepare the child for leaving foster care.

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**Outcome 4: Reduce Time in Foster Care to Reunification Without
Increasing Re-entry**

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children who show physical and mental health stability and/or improvement	Based on our review of 20 Foster Care cases and caseworker interviews, all children were either receiving counseling or in a supportive placement which stabilized any physical or mental health conditions			
Number and percentage of parents with substance abuse who are stable and/or improving	Report under development			
Average number of family/relative visits per child per month (parents, other relatives)	In the 10 Foster Care cases reviewed where visitation was a part of the case plan, we noted an average of 2 visits per child per month from family or relatives.			
Number of children who return to foster care after reunification within 12 months	11	5.79%	201	8.72%

Summary: Our case review indicated that visitation occurred on a regular and planned basis. In instances where visitation did not occur as planned, there was documented followup with the parent or relative to address the need for visitation or reasons for not attending.

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Outcome 5: Reduce Placements of Young Children in Group Homes or Institutions (Federal Requirements)

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children age 12 years and below placed in group homes or institutions	7	2.57%	272	100%

Summary: Spartanburg DSS is taking the age of the child into consideration when arranging placements by considering the availability of individual foster homes first. The lack of available spaces in individual foster homes occasionally precludes placement of siblings together unless in a group home or institution.

Outcome 6: Reduce/Prevent Abuse of Children in Foster Care

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of children in foster care with substantiated or indicated maltreatment by a foster parent or facility staff person	Report under development			

Summary: Spartanburg DSS has regular telephone and face-to-face contacts with foster parents by foster home licensing staff. Not all foster parents are seen at these contacts, and the topics discussed are not clearly documented. The visits with foster children are also not clearly documenting an ongoing assessment of the child's safety.

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Outcome 7: Increase Stability of Placements and Other Aspects of Foster Children's Lives

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children in foster care with more than two placements	66	40.00%	2690	55.53%

Summary: The majority of cases we reviewed had between 1 and 3 changes in placement. The primary reason for change of placement was movement from the emergency shelter to a foster home.

Outcome 8: Increase Stability of Children's Lives

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children who change schools/schools systems:	Of the 17 children reviewed in Foster Care who are attending school: (see below)			
Once	16(94.12%) had changed school once or not at all as the result of placement			
More than once	1(5.88%) had changed school more than once as the result of placements.			
Percentage of cases with more than one change in foster care case workers	Of the 20 cases reviewed, 15(75%) had one or more changes in foster care caseworkers.			

Summary: The documentation in the files reviewed did not directly address changes in schools or school districts, but review staff were able to determine from dictation those changes in schools that were recorded. All cases reviewed had more than one change in caseworkers.

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Outcome 9: Reduce/Prevent Abuse and Neglect of Children

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of indicated cases of child abuse and/or neglect:	23	60.00%	293	46.00%
Total				
Among high-risk populations	Report under development			
Number of fatalities among children known to the agency	Reported Elsewhere			

Summary: Spartanburg DSS has procedures in place to address effective case decision-making and thorough investigative assessment. While practiced with great effectiveness during investigations, the ongoing assessment of child safety in active CPS Treatment and Foster Care cases is not clearly documented or enforced.

Outcome 10: Reduce/Prevent Recurrence of Child Abuse and Neglect

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of cases of children with 2 nd indicated report within 12 months of the 1 st indicated report	Report under development			
Number and percentage of cases of children with 2 nd indicated report within 12 months of reunification	Report under development			

Summary: We noted that most cases reviewed did not have prior CPS history, either of unfounded reports, active agency involvement, or not accepted at referral. The general finding of limited contacts with families, particularity CPS Treatment cases, limited client involvement in case planning, and the practice of simply photocopying and putting new dates on existing Treatment Plans in both CPS Treatment and Foster Care cases presents significant barriers to positive achievement of this outcome.

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**Outcome 11: Limit the Number of Abused and/or Neglected Children
Entering Foster Care to Those Who are Truly Endangered in
Their Home**

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children court ordered into placement	57	34.55%	1131	23.26%
Number and percentage of children placed informally (with relatives)	9	5.45%	269	5.53%
Number and percentage of treatment cases closed with risk reduced and treatment goals achieved (i.e. parents' and children's physical/mental health and safety improved)	15	9.62%	360	7.24%

Summary: We noted a significant number of cases with children in care either returned home or placed with relatives at the probable cause or removal hearing. In these cases, it was not clear why the removal took place instead of arranging the relative placement at the initial contact. This practice of removing then returning a child can be a barrier to achieving this outcome. The limited involvement of clients and service providers in the closure decision, especially with CPS Treatment, calls into question the validity of the number above.

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Outcome 12: Minimize Intrusion upon the Lives of Families and Children

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children and families, when asked, indicate/feel that the agency intruded in their lives:	In the client interviews conducted, all interviewees felt the involvement of the agency was an intrusion into their lives.			
Where services are provided (community based)	Interviews and case record reviews indicated the provision of services in the community and as near to the client as available.			
How we deliver services (mutual planning)	In client interviews and in case record reviews, mutual planning was not occurring.			
When services are provided (convenient hours)	Most interviews reported that it was possible to arrange convenient times for service to be provided.			
How clients were treated (respect and dignity)	Report under development			
Number of days/weeks from achievement of treatment goals to case closure in treatment cases	Report under development			

Summary: The limited involvement of clients and service providers in case planning and evaluation of case plans in terms of activities instead of behavioral change are barriers to the achievement of this outcome.

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Outcome 13: Increase Supply of Foster Home Placement Slots

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of licensed foster home placement slots	110	100%	1842	100%
Kinship care	Report under development			
Placements that fit	Report under development			
Close to home	Report under development			

Summary: Spartanburg DSS has procedures in place to improve support to foster parents and to determine appropriate placements for children.

Outcome 14: Increase Number of Adoptions

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of adoptions finalized	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Summary: Not Reviewed (Separate Organization)

Outcome 15: Reduce Number of Disrupted Adoptions

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of adoptions disrupted within 12 months of finalization	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Summary: Not Reviewed (Separate Organization)