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Child Welfare Quality Assurance Review: Oconee County

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

This report describes the results of the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) Oconee County Quality Assurance Review, conducted April 8-12, 2013. This report is on one of four innovation counties identified in the Program Improvement Plan (PIP). Data from this review will be combined with other innovation counties and reported as part of the quarterly reporting process described in the PIP.

DSS Child Welfare Quality Assurance Reviews are conducted using the Onsite Review Instrument (OSRI) finalized by the federal Administration for Children & Families (ACF) in July 2008. This instrument is used to review foster care and treatment services cases.

The OSRI is divided into three sections: safety, permanency, and child and family well-being. There are two safety outcomes, two permanency outcomes, and three well-being outcomes. Reviewers collect information on a number of items related to each of the outcomes. The ratings for each item are combined to determine the rating for the outcome. Outcomes are rated as being substantially achieved, partially achieved, not achieved, or not applicable. The items are rated as strength, area needing improvement, or not applicable. Ratings for each of the outcomes are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Child Welfare QA Onsite Reviews – Ratings by Outcome

Outcome	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved
Safety 1 Children are, First and Foremost, Protected from Abuse and Neglect	100% (10)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Safety 2 Children are Safely Maintained in their Homes whenever Possible and Appropriate	86.7% (26)	6.7% (2)	6.7% (2)
Permanency 1 Children have Permanency and Stability in their Living Situations	46.7% (7)	46.7% (7)	6.7% (1)
Permanency 2 The Continuity of Family Relationships and Connections is Preserved for Children	80% (12)	20% (3)	0% (0)
Well-Being 1 Families have Enhanced Capacity to Provide for their Children’s Needs	66.7% (20)	33.3% (10)	0% (0)
Well-Being 2 Children receive Appropriate Services to meet their Educational Needs	100% (10)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Well-Being 3 Children receive Adequate Services to meet their Physical and Mental Health Needs	57.7% (15)	23.1% (6)	19.2% (5)

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

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

Onsite Review Instrument (OSRI) Ratings by Item within Outcome

Results for outcomes and items are reported by the number of cases and the percentage of total cases given each rating. In addition, the *percentage of strengths* is calculated for each item. This percentage is calculated by adding the number of *strengths* and the number of *areas needing improvement*. The number of *strengths* is divided into this total to determine the *percentage of strengths*.

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

Two *items* are included under Safety Outcome 1. Ratings for the *items* are shown in Table 2.

Item 1: Timeliness of initiating investigations

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether responses to all accepted child maltreatment reports received during the period under review were initiated and face-to-face contact with the child made, within the timeframes established by agency policies or State statute.

Table 2.

Rating	Item 1	Item 2
<i>Strength</i>	33.3% (10)	33.3% (10)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	0% (0)	0% (0)
<i>Not Applicable</i>	66.7% (20)	66.7% (20)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	100% (10)	100% (10)

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>	60% (18)	86.7% (26)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	6.7% (2)	13.3% (4)
<i>Not Applicable</i>	33.3% (10)	0% (0)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	90% (18)	86.7% (26)

Item 4: Risk assessment and safety management

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, the agency made concerted efforts to assess and address the risk and safety concerns relating to the child(ren) in their own homes or while in foster care.

Permanency Outcome 1: Children have Permanency and Stability in their Living Situations

Six items are included under Permanency Outcome 1. Ratings for the items are shown in Table 4.

Item 5: Foster Care reentries

Purpose of Assessment: To assess whether children who entered foster care during the period under review were re-entering within 12 months of a prior foster care episode.

Item 6: Stability of foster care placement

Purpose of Assessment: To determine if the child in foster care is in a stable placement at the time of the onsite review and that any changes in placement that occurred during the period under review were in the best interest of the child and consistent with achieving the child's permanency goal(s).

Item 7: Permanency goal for child

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether appropriate permanency goals were established for the child in a timely manner.

Item 8: Reunification, guardianship or permanent placement with relatives

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether concerted efforts were made, or are being made, during the period under review, to achieve reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner.

Item 9: Adoption

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made, or are being made, to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner.

Item 10: Other planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA)

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, the agency made concerted efforts to ensure:

- That the child is adequately prepared to make the transition from foster care to independent living (if it is expected that the child will remain in foster care until he or she reaches the age of majority or is emancipated).
- That the child, even though remaining in foster care, is in a "permanent" living arrangement with a foster parent or relative caregiver and that there is a commitment on the part of all parties involved that the child remain in that placement until he or she reaches the age of majority or is emancipated.
- That the child is in a long-term care facility and will remain in that facility until transition to an adult care facility.

Table 4.

Rating	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8	Item 9	Item 10
<i>Strength</i>	16.7% (5)	46.7% (14)	30% (9)	10% (3)	10% (3)	10% (3)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	3.3% (1)	3.3% (1)	20% (6)	6.7% (2)	20% (6)	0% (0)
Not Applicable	80% (24)	50% (15)	50% (15)	83.3% (25)	70% (21)	90% (27)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	83.3% (5)	93.3% (14)	60% (9)	60% (3)	33.3% (3)	100% (3)

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>	36.7% (11)	20% (6)	30% (9)	43.3% (13)	40% (12)	26.7% (8)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	0% (0)	10% (3)	10% (3)	3.3% (1)	10% (3)	13.3% (4)
Not Applicable	63.3% (19)	70% (21)	60% (18)	53.3% (16)	50% (15)	60% (18)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	100% (11)	66.7% (6)	75% (9)	92.9% (13)	80% (12)	66.7% (8)

Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have Enhanced Capacity to Provide for their Children's Needs

Four *items* are included under Well-Being Outcome 1. Ratings for the *items* are shown in Table 6.

Item 17: Needs and services of child, parents, & foster parents

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, the agency made concerted efforts to assess the needs of children, parents, and foster parents (both at the child's entry into foster care [if the child entered during the period under review] or on an ongoing basis) to identify the services necessary to achieve case goals and adequately address the issues relevant to the agency's involvement with the family, and provided the appropriate services.

Item 18: Child & family involvement in case planning

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made (or are being made) to involve parents and children (if developmentally appropriate) in the case planning process on an ongoing basis.

Item 19: Caseworker visits with the child

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and the child(ren) in the case are sufficient to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child and promote achievement of case goals.

Item 20: Caseworker visits with parents

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and the mothers and fathers of the children are sufficient to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the children and promote achievement of case goals.

Table 6.

Rating	Item 17	Item 18	Item 19	Item 20
<i>Strength</i>	80% (24)	80% (24)	90% (27)	43.3% (13)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	20% (6)	16.7% (5)	10% (3)	50% (15)
Not Applicable	0% (0)	3.3% (1)	0% (0)	6.7% (2)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	80% (24)	82.8% (24)	90% (27)	46.4% (13)

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>	33.3% (10)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	0% (0)
Not Applicable	66.7% (20)
Total	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	100% (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>	50% (15)	46.7% (14)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	30% (9)	13.3% (4)
Not Applicable	20% (6)	40% (12)
Total	100% (30)	100% (30)
<i>% Strengths</i>	62.5% (15)	77.8% (14)

ORSI Ratings by Item within Outcome Summary

Many cases reviewed during this round of data collection had a number of positives:

- Investigations were initiated and face-to-face contact was made in a timely manner.
- Repeat maltreatment did not occur within the past six months.
- The agency made efforts to ensure that youth with a permanency goal of APPLA were adequately prepared to transition.
- Concerted efforts were made to ensure that children received foster care placements that were close enough to parents to facilitate face-to-face contact.
- Efforts were made to assess and address the children’s educational needs.

SECTION II: FOSTER CARE LICENSE REVIEW

As part of the Quality Assurance Review Process in Oconee 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 *SC Department of Social Services 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*.

Section One. Five foster care issuances for initial/standard licenses were reviewed. Issues that led to the rating of *ANI* for three cases include:

- Background checks were not completed.
- Documentation was missing, inconsistent, or unclear (e.g., State Office licensing records, DSS form 3042, and background checks results were missing; firearm records were inconsistent or unclear).

Section Two. Two of the cases reviewed were rated *strengths* because 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 three cases include:

- All necessary background checks on foster parents and alternative caregivers were not completed.
- Medical statements on the household members were not in the case file.
- The case files did not contain quarterly home visit guides.
- The case files did not contain documentation of all required training hours.
- A foster home is licensed for children ages 0-18 but has not had a lead assessment.
- Fire drills were not consistently conducted on a monthly basis.

Table 9. Summary of Ratings for Sections One and Two

Rating	Section One: Initial	Section Two: Renewal
<i>Strength</i>	2 (40%)	2 (40%)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	3 (60%)	3 (60%)
Total	5 (100%)	5 (100%)
% <i>Strengths</i>	40%	40%

Section Three results are displayed in Table 10. Deficiencies were noted in eight of the ten files reviewed. Deficiencies noted in Section Three may not invalidate the license but still require attention and correction by county management. Several issues were identified by the reviewers including:

- Household members were not visited during the quarterly visits.
- Case files did not contain information or background checks on alternative caregivers.
- A foster parent's daughter was not listed in the relationship screen in CAPSS.

Table 10. Section 3: Other Standard Licensing and Practice Issues

	Yes	No	NA	Total
A.1. Home visits documented in CAPSS?	10	0	0	10
A.2. Adult household members visited?	3	7	0	10
B. CAPSS consistent with 1513?	9	1	0	10
C. Licensing issues addressed during each quarterly visit documented in CAPSS?	7	0	3	10
D. Supervisory Review conducted	10	0	0	10
E. Discussion of safety guidelines regarding access to in-ground swimming pools documented in CAPSS?	2	0	8	10
F. Background checks completed on alternative caregivers?	1	5	4	10

SECTION III: CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICE SCREEN-OUT REVIEW

A review of ten screened-out allegations was completed to determine whether the reports were appropriately screened-out. The reports were randomly selected from the list of reports screened-out by the county during the period under review. The *Screened-Out CPS Referral Review Instrument* was used to conduct the review. This instrument includes a description of the allegation and three questions:

- Was this case appropriately screened out? Rated as *yes*, *no*, or *cannot determine*.
- Were necessary collateral contacts made? Rated as *yes*, *no*, or *not applicable*.
- Were appropriate referrals made? Rated as *yes*, *no*, or *not applicable*.

Yes answers are considered *strengths*, No answers are considered *Area Needing Improvement* (ANI), and N/A answers are not applicable.

The percentage of *strengths* is also calculated for each question. 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 appropriately screened-out?	Were necessary collaterals contacted?	Were appropriate referrals made?
<i>Strength</i>	7 (70%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	3 (30%)	2 (20%)	3 (30%)
Not Applicable	0 (0%)	6 (60%)	6 (60%)
Total	10 (100%)	10 (100%)	10 (100%)
<i>% Strengths</i>	70%	50%	25%

Three cases were determined to be screened out inappropriately. In the first case, a child alleged that her stepfather hit her on separate occasions. The reviewer determined that given the severity of the allegation, the case should have been accepted (a similar report came in seven days later and was accepted with a high overall rating). Additionally, collateral contacts were not made to provide more information before the report was screened out. In the second case, a mother allegedly misused/abuse prescription drugs. The mother allegedly did so at home and while driving in her car with the children. The reviewer determined that the report should have been accepted given two previously unaccepted reports with the same typology and a criminal domestic violence conviction in 2008. Again, collateral contacts were not made to verify the allegation. In the third case, a mother was allegedly using food stamps fraudulently and not taking care of her children. The reviewer noted that multiple reports for this family were screened out since 2008 with similar typologies. Given the previous allegations, the report should have been accepted (a subsequent report was accepted approximately four months later). Furthermore, collateral contacts should have been made, and the family should have received service referrals.

SECTION IV: CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES UNFOUNDED REPORTS REVIEW

Five unfounded reports were reviewed to determine whether the reports were appropriately unfounded. 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 *Child Welfare Services Review Instrument for Unfounded Reports*. This instrument includes a description of the allegation, the risk level assigned to the case at Intake, and three questions (all rated as *yes* or *no*):

- Was the investigation initiated in a timely manner?
- Was an adequate assessment conducted?
- Was the decision to unfound the case appropriate?

Questions rated as Yes on the assessment are considered *strengths* and those rated as No are considered *Area Needing Improvement (ANI)*.

The percentage of *strengths* is also calculated for each question. 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 12.

Table 12. Summary of Ratings for Unfounded Reports Review

Rating	Was the investigation initiated in a timely manner?	Was an adequate assessment conducted?	Was the decision to unfound the case appropriate?
<i>Strength</i>	5 (100%)	5 (100%)	5 (100%)
<i>Area needing improvement</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	5 (100%)	5 (100%)	5 (100%)
<i>% Strengths</i>	100%	100%	100%

All of the cases that were reviewed had investigations that were initiated in a timely manner. Additionally, all of the cases had adequate assessments, and all of the decisions to unfound the cases were made appropriately.