

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

The South Carolina Department of Social Services Human Services Division conducted a qualitative review of Dorchester 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, DAODAS, 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 August 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	6/01/01 - 8/31/01	4/01/01 - 6/30/01	8/31/01	6/01/01- 8/31/01	8/31/01	6/01/01 - 8/31/01	8/31/01
Case Population for Period Under Review	33	96	72	13	30	43	14
Cases Sampled	20	20	20	13	20	14	14
Cases Reviewed	20	19	20	13	13	12	12

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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	46	100%	4862	100%
Children in care more than 12 months	SACWIS	13	28.26%	3052	62.77%
In care more than 12 months where permanency hearing has not been held	SACWIS	5	38.46%	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 which adversely affect this outcome. Dorchester DSS has the structure in place which has the potential 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	0	N/A	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: Not applicable in this county.

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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 8 cases reviewed where Foster Children were in school, we found that 5 (62.50%) were on grade level, and 7 cases (87.50%) were attending school and exhibiting no attendance or behavior problems. The case with attendance or behavior problems was receiving support services.			
Number and percentage of children and adolescents who show physical and mental health is stable or improving (therapy, screenings)	In the 13 cases reviewed, we found that the 3 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 13 cases reviewed, we found that no children were identified with substance abuse issues.			
Number and percentage of runaways	4	8.70%	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 no instances of pregnancy or of a foster child fathering a child.			
Number and percentage who are adjudicated for delinquency: once, more than once.	In the 13 cases reviewed, we found that 4(30.77%) children were involved with delinquency issues.			

Summary: Based on case reviews, children in foster care in Dorchester are generally experiencing few problems with school, behavior, or substance abuse. The Independent Living cases reviewed documented realistic case plans 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 13 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 8 Foster Care cases 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	22	19.30%	201	8.72%

Summary: Our case review indicated that visitation occurred on a regular and planned basis. In those 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	1	0.37%	272	100%

Summary: Dorchester 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	4	4.08%	98	100%

Summary: Dorchester DSS has regular telephone or 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 usually related to children in care and not foster parenting issues. We noted a concern with a lack of discussion of the Agency's policy on the use of corporal punishment. 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	22	47.83%	2690	55.53%

Summary: The majority of cases we reviewed had between 1 and 5 placements. In those cases with higher numbers of placements, the reason for changing placements was not documented clearly in the record.

Outcome 8: Increase Stability of Children's Lives

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children who change schools/schools systems:	Of the 8 children in Foster Care who are attending school:			
Once	5 (82.50%) had changed school once as the result of placement			
More than once	3(17.50%) 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 13 cases reviewed, 9 (69.23%) had more than one change 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.

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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:	10	41.00%	293	46.00%
Total				
Among high-risk populations	Report under development			
Number of fatalities among children known to the agency	Reported Elsewhere			

Summary: Dorchester DSS has regular staffing procedures in place to address effective case decision-making. In actual practice, investigations are poorly documented and case decisions are usually based on limited contact with the family and collateral contacts. Local Law Enforcement appears to have excessive influence in case decisions by the Agency. As stated before, ongoing assessment of child safety in active CPS Treatment and Foster Care cases is not clearly documented or enforced.

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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 had prior CPS history, either of unfounded reports, active agency involvement, or not accepted at referral. The general finding of limited contacts with families, particularly CPS Treatment cases, limited client involvement in case planning and case closure, and limited supervisory involvement are significant factors which can adversely affect 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	11	23.91%	1131	23.26%
Number and percentage of children placed informally (with relatives)	9	19.57%	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)	3	3.26%	360	7.24%

Summary: 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)	Clients interviewed reported that they were not involved in planning, but were told what to do.			
Number of days/weeks from achievement of treatment goals to case closure in treatment cases	Report under development			

Summary: There are regular staffings with other agencies, but the exchange of progress reports was not clearly documented. The limited involvement of clients and service providers in case planning and evaluation of case plans in terms of activities instead of behavioral change can be 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	33	100%	1695	100%
Kinship care	Report under development			
Placements that fit	Report under development			
Close to home	Report under development			

Summary: Dorchester DSS has procedures in place to improve support to foster parents and to determine appropriate placements for children. However, there is not a plan for recruitment of new foster homes.

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)