

## **North Carolina Division of Social Services Child and Family Services Review Protocol**

### **A. Goals, Mission, and Desired Outcomes for the Children's Services System**

The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) is the process established to measure the performance of the State Child Welfare System. The Administration for Child and Families has set a very high standard of performance for Child Welfare Systems. The focus of the CFSR process is on continuous quality improvement; standards are set high to ensure ongoing attention to the goal of achieving positive outcomes for children and families with regard to safety, permanence, and well-being. In order for a county to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, ninety-five percent of the cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome.

The North Carolina Division of Social Services and one hundred county Departments of Social Services share in their commitment to excellence in providing services to children and their families. To that end, they share common goals, mission, vision, and desired outcomes for the Child Welfare System.

There are three main Goals for the Child Welfare System: to achieve Safety, Permanence, and Well-being for all children in North Carolina.

**Mission:** The Child Welfare Services Section is committed to providing family-centered services to children and families to achieve well-being through ensuring self-sufficiency, support, safety and permanence.

**Vision:** Every child in North Carolina will grow up in a safe, permanent, self-sufficient family where well-being needs of all are met.

The Desired Outcomes for Child Welfare Services are to:

1. Protect children from abuse and neglect.
2. Reduce recurrence of abuse and neglect
3. Maintain children's safety in their own homes.
4. Prevent inappropriate entry into foster care.
5. Reduce abuse and neglect in foster care.
6. Provide permanence and stability for children in their living situations.
7. Reduce time in foster care to permanence within one year or less.
8. Reduce reentry into foster care.
9. Support and sustain continuity of family relationships and family connections.
10. Increase the capacity of families to provide for children.
11. Promote appropriate education services for children.

12. Arrange for adequate mental health and physical health services for children.
13. Limit placement of young children in group homes and institutions.

**B. Purpose of Child and Family Services Reviews**

The purpose of the Child and Family Services Review is to assist in achieving the goals, mission, vision and desired outcomes for the Child Welfare System in North Carolina. The reviews provide a mechanism for evaluating the Child Welfare Services System's response to children and families; for identifying management, training, system, community and policy issues; for recognizing strengths in practice; and for making recommendations to strengthen the delivery of all children's services programs statewide.

**C. Confidentiality**

All requirements for confidentiality as stated in federal and state statutes, administrative rules and in Chapters IV, VI and VIII, Volume 1, Children's Services of the Family Services Manual for the North Carolina Division of Social Services shall be followed. Identifying or case specific information will not be incorporated into the Child and Family Services review report.

The Child and Family Services Review report, attachments, and accompanying cover letter are considered public documents and are subject to the conditions outlined in Chapter 132 of the North Carolina General Statutes.

**D. Review Coordination**

1. Counties to be Reviewed

All medium and large counties in North Carolina will receive a Child and Family Services Review. Smaller counties will be reviewed under an alternative review procedure, using the same review instrument and incorporating training on an internal peer review process. **Refer to Section K for more information on these reviews.**

2. Notification Process

A schedule will be prepared and released semiannually by the Child Welfare Services Section. This calendar is subject to amendment by the Division should it become necessary to change dates due to unexpected events in the Division.

Review materials will be sent to the county director by the Child Welfare Services Section forty-five days prior to the scheduled review. Included in this packet are the following:

- a. A notification letter to the county director to confirm the week scheduled for the review.
  - b. The contact information of the Lead Reviewer.
  - c. The sample of cases to be reviewed, including an oversample to be used in the event the chosen samples do not meet the criteria.
  - d. Instructions for submitting the following information to the Lead Reviewer:
    - Information must be submitted within two weeks of the notification letter.
    - Verification that cases listed in the In-Home Services sample received In-Home Services for a minimum of 60 days with no child in the family in foster care for more than 24 hours during the period under review.
    - Verification that the cases listed in the Placement sample were active for a minimum of eight days during the sample period.
    - Information identifying which, if any, of the sample list contained jurisdiction/cross county cases, and which other counties were involved. A maximum of two jurisdiction cases will be reviewed.
    - The name of the county staff member the director designates as the Agency Review Coordinator.
    - The names of the county staff the director designates as part of the review team.
    - The names and addresses of the chair of the Community Child Protection Team, Guardian ad Litem Administrator, agency attorney, child district court judge, and the chair of the Foster Parent Association. These individuals, as well as the chair of the county board of social services, are identified as community stakeholders who will receive a questionnaire from the Division. If the CCPT or Foster Parent chair is a child welfare staff member, another community member who serves on the particular committee will be identified to receive the questionnaire.
  - e. The Agency Self Report is to be completed by the agency within thirty days of notification, and is to be submitted by email attachment. The purpose of the report is to provide information related to the Children's Services program and system issues in the county. This provides the agency with the opportunity to identify agency and program strength, to offer a self-evaluation of outcomes data, to describe any changes that the agency has instituted since the last review, and to comment on any areas needing improvement in the county's Children's Services system. The Agency Self-Report will be incorporated into the final review report. The Division's Lead Reviewer should be contacted whenever there are questions regarding submission of the requested information or the protocol.
3. Agency Review Coordinator  
The county agency shall designate a Review Coordinator who will perform the following Responsibilities:

- Coordinate with the designated Lead Reviewer from the Division regarding any of their responsibilities or questions about the review protocol;
- Verify, according to criteria discussed below under Case Selection and Review, that the cases in the random sample received from the Division meet the criteria to be reviewed;
- Orient local staff to the purpose and activities of the review;
- Ensure that selected review team members will attend the required training provided prior to the agency review and that copies of training materials are available in advance of the training date;
- Schedule and confirm interviews with each person involved in a case who is to be interviewed and orient those persons to the purposes of the review;
- Schedule and confirm interviews with each person involved in a case who is to be interviewed and orient those persons to the purposes of the review;
- Ensure that workers and supervisors assigned to the cases selected for review are scheduled for interviews on their case(s);
- Prepare a listing of scheduled interviews for each review team that includes the name of the person to be interviewed, their relevance to the case, the time, date, and type of interview, whether office visit or telephone, and telephone number if appropriate;
- Reserve space for training, record review (preferably individual offices with telephones), interviews, and other planned meetings;
- Assemble all case records to be reviewed so that they will be accessible and ready for review at the onset of the review.

#### 4. Review Team and Training

It is recommended that the agency designates staff with pre-service training or an approved equivalent, or child welfare experience, to partner with the Division staff on the review team. Each county reviewer will be paired with a Division reviewer to work as a team. The Division review team will be made up of personnel from the Quality Assurance/Review team and from the Local Operations Support (Children's Program Representatives), and may include consultants from other teams in the Child Welfare Section of the Department of Social Services. The Quality Assurance for the review will be conducted by a member of the Division's Quality Assurance & CFSR Review Team. Training for county staff will be provided onsite by the Division prior to the agency's CFSR. The day-long training includes use of a case scenario and practice with the CFSR instrument. It is highly recommended that Agency management also attend the training. The Lead Reviewer will coordinate with the Agency Review Coordinator to finalize a date for training

#### **E. Case Selection and Review**

## 1. General Case Sampling Guidelines

The sample is selected from the universe of cases in the program area under review. The universe includes all children whose cases were open for services during the sampling period. Cases for children in foster care will be selected by the child's name and cases involving In-Home Services will be selected by the family name.

Cases to be reviewed will be selected from cases that were open for In-Home or Placement Services during a twelve month sampling period. For In-Home Services cases, the universe is a list of cases that were open for services for at least 60 consecutive days during the twelve months of the sample period and in which no children in the family were in foster care for more than 24 hours during any portion of the review period. The universe for choosing placement cases are those cases opened eight days or longer during the twelve months of the sample period.

Selected cases will be assessed for their level of outcome achievement beginning with the start of the sample period, and ending at the time of the on-site review. This is the **period under review (PUR)**. Any child and family services that were provided during the period under review will be reviewed. If a case was selected for review for Placement Services and In-Home Services were also provided during the period under review, In-Home Services provided would also be reviewed. Additionally, any assessments conducted during the period under review will be reviewed.

The Agency Review Coordinator will verify that the cases meet the criteria outlined below. Sample cases must have been open for In-Home Services a minimum of 60 days during the sample period in the county being reviewed, even though services may be closed at the time of the on-site review. For Placement cases, services must have been open a minimum of 8 days. Cases eligible for review (minimum of 60 or 8 days depending on the service area) may fall into one of the following categories:

- Opened for services prior to the twelve-month sampling period, and continued to be open at least the first 60/8 days of the sampling period; or
- Opened for services during the twelve-month sampling period, and at least 60/8 days of services provided during the sampling period.

Only under the following circumstances and only after a discussion with the Division's Lead Reviewer may a case be rejected and replaced with one from the over-sample list:

- If it is an In-Home Services case open more than one time during the review period;

- If the case was pulled in error and had not been open for services for a minimum of 60 days for In-Home Services or a minimum of 8 days for Placement during the sample period;
- If the case was pulled specifically for In-Home Services and the child was in foster care for 24 hours or longer;
- If the child selected is a sibling of a child previously selected.
- If the primary social worker and supervisor, and parent or other caretaker, at minimum, are either unavailable or unwilling to be interviewed such that sufficient information cannot be obtained to complete the review instrument; or
- If the child is placed for the entire period under review in a locked juvenile facility.

## 2. Stratification and Selection of Case Samples

CPS In-Home cases will be selected from cases open for 215 services as indicated in the Division’s automated information system. Child Placement cases will be selected from the list of all children open for services on the PQA -084.

Eight Placement cases, and four In-Home Services cases will be reviewed. Two Placement cases will be selected from each of the four categories outlined in the Table 1.

Table 1: Stratification of Placement Cases

| <b>Category of Placement Case</b> | <b>Description of Cases To Be Reviewed</b>   | <b>Rationale for Reviewing Cases of This Type</b>   |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Category 1                        | Cases involving children who were ages 16 or 17 as of the last date of the period under review (PUR) or the date they exited care, as applicable. These children could have any permanency goal and could have entered care either before or during the PUR. | Categories 1-3 may include children entering foster care during the PUR, which will ensure a proportion of this case type that is consistent with the regulation and that will address the need to focus on agency practice. The case numbers for these categories were based on the need to focus on 1) agency practice during the PUR 2) the emphasis on foster care re-entries 3) the focus on the population of older youth in foster care. |
| Category 2                        | Cases involving children who were under age 16 as of the last day of the PUR or the date that they exited care, as applicable. These children will have a current permanency goal of adoption and will have entered care either before or during the PUR.    |   |
| Category 3                        | Cases involving children who were under age 16 as of the last day of the PUR or the date they exited care, as applicable, and who entered care during the PUR. These cases could have  |   |

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|            | any permanency goal except adoption.   |  |
| Category 4 | Cases involving children who were under age 16 as of the last day of the PUR or the date they exited care, as applicable, and who entered care prior to the PUR. These cases could have any permanency goal except adoption. | This category is intended to allow the random selection of case plan goals other than adoption. These include guardianship/custody with relatives, and other types of cases involving children younger than 16 with a goal of APPLA. |

### 3. Investigative and Family Assessments

Investigative and Family Assessments contained in the records selected for review will be rated if they occurred during the period under review. The Agency will identify from the provided sample list those cases in which a Family Assessment or Investigative Assessment was conducted during the period under review.

### 4. Jurisdiction Cases

If records selected for review had involvement with other counties during the period under review, the other county involved will be rated under items relevant to their work on that case. If there are more than two records selected for review that involve jurisdiction issues, only two of the records will be reviewed for jurisdiction issues. A CFSR Instrument will be completed by the review team for each county's portion of the jurisdiction case. Items in the other records will be rated as "not applicable" if the work was completed by another county. The Agency Coordinator will request and obtain case files and documentation, from all counties involved, for the on-site review and have them available when the on-site review commences.

### 5. Screened-out Reports

A sample of ten reports not accepted for CPS Investigative/Family Assessment will be selected by the Lead Reviewer on-site from the existing agency files of the period under review. These reports will be assessed for the following policy standards:

- adherence to state definitions of abuse, neglect and dependency;
- thoroughness and use of the screening tools on the intake form;
- appropriate referrals to LE, DA, SBI and licensing agencies;
- compliance with jurisdiction policy; and
- appropriate two level review on intake decisions.

## **F. Preparation of Records for Review**

All case records to be reviewed should be available at the review sites in their entirety, including information for periods preceding the period under review. This includes child protective service records, child and family records, and placement provider records, as well as jurisdiction/cross county case(s). Case records should be as organized and up-to-date as to the date of the on-site review, with materials in chronological order. If the agency uses electronic files instead of paper files, it will be necessary for the Agency Review Coordinator to make computers and technical support available to the reviewers or obtain hard copies of the files. Please be reminded that the Agency Review Coordinator is responsible for requesting and ensuring that all case files and documentation for selected jurisdiction/cross county cases are available.

Any records in the sample which the agency cannot locate shall be reviewed and evaluated based on the written information and interview sources that can be collected during the review. The results will be included in the final outcome ratings.

## **G. Case Interviews**

Review team members are responsible for reviewing the case record and interviewing the individuals involved in the cases to which they are assigned. Interviews are a vital part of the review process, and may provide or clarify information about services provided to families and children. The Agency Review Coordinator is responsible for scheduling interviews to take place after the case record reviews. Interviews should not be scheduled for the first day of the review. Reviewers should read the case record before conducting case-related interviews, which will enable them to explore relevant issues with each person interviewed.

Reasonable efforts should be made to schedule interviews with the following persons for each case selected for review unless they are unavailable or unwilling to participate:

- The social worker and/or supervisor most knowledgeable of the case;
- Children who are cognitively and emotionally able to participate;
- Parents, foster parents, relative caretakers, pre-adoptive or adoptive parents;
- A major service provider or other person who has knowledge of the family's situation (e.g. GAL, medical provider, therapist), as appropriate.

When scheduling interviews, it should be remembered that it might be necessary to interview some persons (e.g. GALs) for more than one case. Therefore, attention should be given in scheduling their interviews to avoid lapses or overlapping of time. For time purposes, a maximum of four interviews should be scheduled in thirty minute increments for a case; however, the Agency Coordinator may wish to discuss with the Lead Reviewer the need for more interviews in a particular case. For jurisdiction/cross county cases, interviews for the county being reviewed should follow the standard CFSR protocol outlined above. For any other county(ies)



involved with the jurisdiction/cross county case being reviewed, interviews with the social worker and/or supervisor are sufficient.

Both review team members assigned a particular case are responsible for interviewing the individuals involved in the case, as well as reviewing the case record to maintain the integrity of the state/county agency partnership.

Persons to be interviewed must be prepared for the interview by the Agency Review Coordinator or designee by helping them understand the purpose of the review. They should be assured that their participation is voluntary, but that their participation is critical to the success of the review. By participating in the interview process, clients are given the opportunity to respond to the interviewer's specific questions and to give feedback regarding their experience with the agency. After the interviews have been scheduled the appointments should be confirmed in writing.

## **H. Local Stakeholder Questionnaires**

The review includes a survey of community representatives, i.e., stakeholders, who are knowledgeable about the functioning of the agency in the community. The Division will provide questionnaires to individuals identified as stakeholders. The purpose of these questionnaires is to obtain information about the systemic factors under review, and about how the system factors affect the outcomes for children and families in general, not on a case-specific basis.

Once the stakeholders have been identified and their names and addresses provided to the Division, it is recommended that county staff inform the stakeholders that they will be receiving the survey and encourage them to complete and return the questionnaire to the Division.

## **I. Review Process**

### **1. Entrance Conference**

The Lead Reviewer will hold an entrance conference with the agency director, county staff who will participate as part of the review team, and others at the discretion of the director. This meeting will include introductions of Division and agency staff, a discussion of the review process, data, and self-report and also an opportunity for the county to ask questions or share information regarding agency protocol, procedures or record keeping that could aid the reviewers in the review process.

### **2. Team Meetings**

During the onsite review, the review team will meet daily to discuss the day's activities and identify problems or concerns regarding the schedules, logistical arrangements, instruments or other areas. The Lead Reviewer determines whether

all review activities are proceeding according to schedule and whether adjustments to the schedule or workflow are needed.

### 3. Review of Records

The designated case records should be available to the reviewers immediately upon the conclusion of the entrance conference. The case records should be clearly labeled with the name of the child and the sample number.

Individual teams will examine the case records to measure the county's performance related to outcomes. Findings from the case record review along with supporting/clarifying information obtained from interviews will be documented on the review instrument. Ratings will be based on information in the case records and interviews with individuals who are pertinent to the case.

Final case rating decisions will be made by the state/county review teams through completion of the review instrument, reviews of the case records and conducting of interviews. The decisions made by the county/state partners, in agreement with the reviewer providing Quality Assurance, are final. If, during the review process, there are unresolved issues and the county/state partners cannot reach a consensus, the Lead Reviewer will make the final decision based on information from the team and clarification with the Division if necessary

### 4. Quality Assurance

The Lead Reviewer and/or other state staff provide Quality Assurance to each review instrument prior to the debriefing to the review team. This assures all items on the instrument are answered if applicable and that items are consistently assessed throughout the review. After a Quality Assurance review, the case will be debriefed.

### 5. Team Debriefings

Debriefings may occur several times during the course of the on-site review to present a forum for the review teams to present their case and their rationale for their outcome ratings. The debriefings provide opportunities for case discussion within a structured agenda to ensure that all cases are adequately debriefed by the team. The agency director and/or designated management and staff are strongly encouraged to attend the de-briefing sessions. Debriefings are an opportunity for team members and the agency director or his/her designee to ask questions for clarification of findings.

Before case debriefing, the state review team will provide the county agency consultation around any areas needing improvement or areas of concern found during the case review process.

## 6. Exit Conference and Determination of Substantial Conformity

Following the last debriefing, the Lead Reviewer will hold an exit conference to provide a verbal report to the county agency. This gives the Lead Reviewer an opportunity to share preliminary information with the county participants who are most likely to benefit, including but not limited to case workers, supervisors or local administrators. During the exit conference, the Lead Reviewer will identify key areas on which the county should focus in developing its improvement plan in addition to those areas of continued strength. The findings are presented as preliminary because a complete analysis of the information is not possible until after the onsite review.

The determination of the county's substantial conformity is included in the final written report provided to the county following the onsite review. A preliminary determination of the county's substantial conformity in each outcome will be presented at the exit conference. The following are steps used for determining substantial conformity with the outcomes.

- Reviewers determine whether outcomes are substantially achieved in the individual cases they review.
- All cases reviewed in the county, possibly with the exception of some individual outcomes depending upon involvement in the jurisdiction/cross-county cases, are tallied by outcome to determine the number of cases in which each outcome is substantially achieved.
- The percentages of cases in which outcomes are substantially achieved are used to determine substantial conformity for each outcome. The county will achieve substantial conformity in any outcome in which the national standard of 95% is achieved.

The goal of the CFSR is continuous quality improvement. A county, therefore, is required to develop a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) for any outcomes that do not achieve substantial conformity, with the goal of eventually achieving the outcome.

### **J. Compilation of Results and Preparation of the Report**

The Division will prepare the review report, which will include analysis of all outcomes of the review and relevant data. The analysis will focus on broad program issues, with emphasis on identified strengths, but will also address areas in need of improvement. Information provided by the county DSS in the Agency Self Assessment will be incorporated into the review report. The Division will email the Child and Family Services Review Report to the Director within thirty days from the last day of the record review. Upon finalization of the final review report, it is a public document to be treated as such by both the county and the state.

### **K. Child and Family Reviews for Smaller Counties**

The case record review procedure for medium and large counties may not be appropriate for smaller counties who have minimal to no Placement cases. For those agencies, a state reviewer will team with a Children's Program Representative (CPR) and conduct a review appropriate for the agency's caseload size and organization. These will be scheduled separately from the CFSR schedule released by the Division for medium and larger counties.

#### **L. Division Follow-up/Program Improvement Plan Development**

Areas needing improvement will be identified by the Review Team and conveyed in the Exit conference at the conclusion of the Review. In the Exit Conference, the Lead Reviewer will outline the findings in the Review, identify specific areas needing improvement, and identify strengths in the county program. Additionally, the CPR assigned to the county will receive a copy of the specific findings.

For the counties being reviewed, the assigned CPR will set up a site visit within thirty days after the agency receives the report to review the issues and recommendations contained in the report. The contact will also provide a time the CPR and county staff to further assess the strengths of the county's program, review the report findings to determine if there are any overarching practice issues that need to be addressed, and draft strategies for the county staff to use in developing a Program Improvement Plan (Plan). The CPR and other appropriate Division staff will provide any additional technical assistance the county needs in formulating the Plan.

For counties having jurisdiction/cross county cases reviewed, a Plan is required to address areas identified as an area needing improvement. The Lead Reviewer will relay the Review findings to the county and the CPR assigned to the county immediately after the review. As with the county being reviewed, the assigned CPR will set up a site visit within thirty days after the agency receives the report to review the issues and recommendations contained in the report. The contact will also provide a time the CPR and county staff to further assess the strengths of the county's program, review the report findings to determine if there are any overarching practice issues that need to be addressed, and draft strategies for the county staff to use in developing a Plan. The CPR and other appropriate Division staff will provide any additional technical assistance the county needs in formulating the Plan.

The county will develop and submit a Program Improvement Plan within forty five days of the date of the report or written notification to the jurisdiction county. The county will submit their Plan to the assigned CPR for review with appropriate Division staff for any feedback or adjustments. The Plan must include benchmarks and time frames for completion. The Local Support Team Manager will complete a final review of the Plan for approval and will send notice regarding acceptance of the Plan.

The county's assigned CPR and other Division staff will monitor progress on the implementation of the elements in the Plan at least quarterly. This will be completed through a review with county staff to 1.) assure that any changes in practice outlined in the Plan are implemented, 2.) review outcome data in the areas being addressed, and, 3.) review results from case record reviews. During this period, the CPR and Division staff will provide the county with any technical assistance that is needed to achieve positive outcomes. Quarterly reports will be provided to county staff on the Division's assessment.

When the goals of the Plan are achieved, the county can submit a request to the assigned CPR with justification for being removed from PIP status. After a review of the progress, a recommendation will be made for removal from some or all of the areas being addressed. The Division will notify the county in writing of their removal from Program Improvement status.

## **M. Conclusion**

The intent of the Child and Family Services Review process is to enhance the quality of practice in North Carolina's Children's Services system. The reviews give the Division and county departments of social services a structural assessment of their programs and allow them to direct energy to the areas most needing improvement. Counties can use the results of their review to document their compliance with accreditation requirements for Child Welfare Services. Counties that are doing well have the opportunity to use the review process to provide their community with documentation of the positive work that they do.

The reviews also serve to identify needs for training and technical assistance from the Division, and to fulfill the need for public reporting of children's services issues. Periodically, the Division of Social Services, Child Welfare Services Section, will prepare an analysis of the findings from the Child and Family Services review in a summary report that will be made public.