

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau

Final Report

South Carolina Child and Family Services Review

September 2, 2003

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Final Report: South Carolina Child and Family Services Review

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of South Carolina. The CFSR was conducted the week of June 23, 2003. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the State child welfare agency – the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS);
- The State Data Profile, prepared by the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which provides State child welfare data for the years 1999 through 2001;
- Reviews of 50 cases at three sites throughout the State;
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State-level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, and attorneys.

A key finding of the South Carolina CFSR is that the State is in substantial conformity with one of the seven outcomes and with five of the seven systemic factors. With regard to the outcomes, South Carolina achieved substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. That is, the results of the CFSR indicate that DSS responds to maltreatment reports in accordance with State-established timeframes and is effective in preventing maltreatment recurrence among children already known to the child welfare agency. The State’s percent of maltreatment recurrence in 2001 (3.4%), as indicated in the Statewide Data Profile, demonstrates that South Carolina meets the national standard for this measure.

The two weakest areas of State performance on the child welfare outcomes pertained to substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.) and Well Being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.). With regard to Permanency Outcome 1, cases in Marion County (57%) and cases in Lexington County (50%) were more likely to have substantially achieved this outcome than cases in Greenville County (27%). The case reviews and State data indicate that the DSS is not consistently effective in achieving finalized adoptions in a timely manner or in ensuring placement stability for children in foster care. In addition, although the State met the national standard for the percentage of reunifications occurring within 12 months of a child’s entry into foster care, the case reviews found that in a substantial percentage of the applicable cases reviewed, the DSS had not made diligent efforts to achieve the goal of reunification in a timely manner.

With regard to Well Being Outcome 1, all of the indicators for this outcome were determined to be in need of improvement. Although performance on this outcome was fairly low in all sites, cases in Marion County were more likely to be rated as having substantially

achieved this outcome (67%) than were cases in Lexington County (36%) or in Greenville County (29%). A key concern identified was that caseworkers were not visiting parents and children with sufficient frequency to ensure the child's safety and well-being and promote attainment of case goals.

The State was determined to be in substantial conformity with the systemic factors of Statewide Information System; Quality Assurance System; Training, Agency Responsiveness to the Community; and Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. The State did not achieve substantial conformity with the systemic factors of Case Review System or Service Array. With respect to the systemic factor of Case Reviews, the CFSR found that the State was not convening permanency hearings in accordance with Federal requirements. Stakeholders noted that the court does not take responsibility for tracking permanency hearing requirements and the court does not automatically schedule children for future hearings at the time of a hearing or review. In addition, stakeholder interviews and case reviews revealed that parents are not being routinely involved in the case planning process; the CFSR case review process resulted in a rating of Area Needing Improvement for 53 percent of the cases.

The findings with regard to the State's performance on the safety and permanency outcomes are presented in table 1 at the end of the Executive Summary. Findings regarding well-being outcomes are presented in table 2. Table 3 presents the State's performance relative to the national standards, and table 4 provides information pertaining to the State's substantial conformity with the seven systemic factors assessed through the CFSR.

I. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES

Safety Outcome 1: Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect

Safety Outcome 1 incorporates two indicators. One pertains to the timeliness of initiating a response to a child maltreatment report (item 1), and the other relates to the recurrence of substantiated or indicated maltreatment for the same children (item 2). South Carolina achieved substantial conformity for Safety Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 91.8 percent of the cases reviewed, which is greater than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity;
- The State met the national standard for the percentage of children experiencing more than one substantiated or indicated child maltreatment report within a 6-month period;
- The State met the national standard for the percentage of children maltreated while in foster care.

The case review findings and stakeholder comments indicate that DSS caseworkers are consistent in responding to maltreatment reports in accordance with the State's required timeframes. This is a particularly noteworthy finding because DSS requires that a response to high-risk reports must be initiated within 2 hours of receipt of the report (including establishing face-to-face contact with the child victim) and a response to moderate or low-risk reports must be initiated within 24 hours of receipt. Stakeholders noted that DSS provides 24-hour availability to receive maltreatment reports and that law enforcement and DSS work collaboratively in responding to reports.

Case reviews also found that repeat maltreatment, as it is measured for the CFSR (item 2), did not occur frequently. This is consistent with the State Data Profile indicating that South Carolina's incidence of maltreatment recurrence in FY 2001 was 3.4 percent, which meets the national standard for this measure of 6.1 percent or less.

Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate

Performance relevant to safety outcome 2 is assessed through 2 indicators. One indicator (item 3) addresses the issue of DSS' efforts to prevent children's removal from their homes by providing services to the families that ensure children's safety while they remain in their homes. The other indicator (item 4) pertains to DSS' effectiveness in reducing the risk of harm to the child.

South Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 71.4 percent of the cases reviewed, which does not meet the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity. Cases in Marion County were more likely to be rated as having substantially achieved this outcome (92%) than were cases in Greenville County (74%) or Lexington County (50%).

Although reviewers determined that in many cases DSS was effective in providing services to maintain children safely in their homes and in reducing the risk of harm to children, there was a substantial number of cases in which reviewers determined that DSS had not made sufficient efforts to ensure the safety of children, particularly when they remained in their homes. A key concern identified in these cases pertained to a lack of adequate assessment of the underlying problems in the family, which in turn resulted in a lack of provision of the services necessary to address the risk of harm to children and ensure children's safety.

Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

There are 6 indicators incorporated in the assessment of permanency outcome 1, although not all of them are relevant for all children. The indicators pertain to the agency's effectiveness in preventing foster care re-entry (item 5), ensuring placement stability for children in foster care (item 6), and establishing appropriate permanency goals for children in foster care in a timely manner (item 7).

Depending on the child's permanency goal, the remaining indicators focus on the agency's efforts to achieve permanency goals (such as reunification, guardianship, adoption, and permanent placement with relatives) in a timely manner (items 8 and 9), or whether the agency is effective in ensuring that children who have other planned living arrangements are in stable placements and adequately prepared for eventual independent living (item 10).

South Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 40.0 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity;
- The State Data Profile indicates that for Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2001, the State did not meet the national standards for (1) the length of time to achieve adoption, and (2) the percentage of children in foster care for 12 months or less who experienced no more than 2 placements.

The State did meet the national standards for the percentage of children in FFY 2001 who (1) were reunified within 12 months of entry into foster care and (2) re-entered foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode.

With respect to permanency outcome 1, the CFSR case reviews found that DSS is usually effective in preventing re-entry into foster care (item 5) and providing appropriate services to youth who are transitioning from foster care to independent living (item 10). However, the CFSR case reviews also found that a substantial percentage of children in foster care do not experience stability in their living arrangements (item 6), and that appropriate permanency goals are not uniformly established in a timely manner (item 7).

Another CFSR case review finding is that in 38 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DSS had not made concerted efforts to achieve reunification in a timely manner. This finding is not consistent with data reported in the State data profile indicating that the State's percent of reunifications within 12 months of the child's entry into foster care met the national standard for that measure. In addition, case reviewers determined that in 77 percent of the applicable cases, DSS had not made the necessary efforts to achieve adoptions in a timely manner. A primary concern identified for adoption pertained to extensive delays in the agency filing for TPR, as well as court-related delays due to overcrowded court dockets and the granting of continuances for TPR hearings.

Permanency Outcome 2. The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Permanency outcome 2 incorporates six indicators that assess agency performance with regard to (1) placing children in foster care in close proximity to their parents and close relatives (item 11); (2) placing siblings together (item 12); (3) ensuring frequent visitation

between children and their parents and siblings in foster care (item 13); (4) preserving connections of children in foster care with extended family, community, cultural heritage, religion, and schools (item 14); (5) seeking relatives as potential placement resources (item 15); and (6) promoting the relationship between children and their parents while the children are in foster care (item 16).

South Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 66.7 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

The CFSR case reviews found that DSS is highly effective in placing children in close proximity to their parents and/or close relatives and in ensuring that siblings are placed together while in foster care, unless separation is deemed necessary to meet at least one child's needs. However, a key CFSR finding was that DSS is not consistently effective in promoting visitation between children in foster care with their parents or with their siblings in foster care. In addition, case reviewers determined that DSS was not consistent in making concerted efforts to (1) seek relatives as placement resources, (2) preserve children's connections to extended families and to their culture and community, and (3) promote the relationship between children and their parents. The key concerns identified were: (1) DSS does not provide sufficient support for children's relationships with their fathers, either through visitation or through other means of preserving connections; and (2) DSS does not routinely support and facilitate visitation among siblings when siblings are separated while in foster care.

Well Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

Well Being Outcome 1 incorporates four indicators. One pertains to agency efforts to ensure that the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents are assessed and that the necessary services are provided to meet identified needs (item 17). A second indicator assesses agency effectiveness with regard to actively involving parents and children (when appropriate) in the case planning process (item 18). The two remaining indicators examine the frequency and quality of caseworker contacts with the children in their caseloads (item 19) and the children's parents (item 20).

South Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 40.0 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Although achievement of Well-Being Outcome 1 was low in all counties, Marion County cases were more likely to be rated as having substantially achieved this outcome (67%) than Lexington County (36%) or Greenville County (29%) cases.

The CFSR case reviews resulted in ratings of Area Needing Improvement for all of the indicators of Well-Being Outcome 1. Reviewers determined that DSS was not consistent in assessing and addressing the service needs of children and their parents, in involving parents and children in the case planning process, and/or in establishing sufficiently frequent face-to-face contact between caseworkers and the children and parents in their caseloads. However, the case reviews also revealed that DSS was more effective with regard to achieving these indicators in the foster care cases than in the in-home services cases; 60 percent of foster care cases were rated as a Strength for this item compared to 25 percent of in-home services cases.

Well Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

There is only one indicator for well being outcome 2, and that pertains to agency effectiveness in addressing children's educational needs (item 21).

South Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2 based on the finding that 84.2 percent of the cases reviewed were determined to have substantially achieved this outcome, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

The CFSR case reviews found that in most of the applicable cases, DSS was effective in assessing children's educational needs and providing appropriate services to meet those needs. However, in 16 percent of these cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to ensure that educational needs were assessed and appropriate services provided.

Well Being Outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

This outcome incorporates two indicators; one assesses agency efforts to meet children's physical health needs (item 22) and the other assesses agency efforts to address children's mental health needs (item 23).

South Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 68.8 percent of the 48 applicable cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.

The CFSR case reviews found that DSS was not consistent in its efforts to address children's needs with respect to both physical and mental health. A key concern identified was that although children often were being assessed for service needs, they were not receiving needed medical, dental, and mental health services.

II. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS

Statewide Information System

Substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System is determined by whether the State is operating a statewide information system that can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for children in foster care.

South Carolina was determined to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor because information on the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child in foster care is readily retrievable from the State's data system—CAPSS.

Case Review System

Five indicators are used to assess the State's performance with regard to the systemic factor of a Case Review System. The indicators examine the development of case plans and parent involvement in that process (item 25), the consistency of 6-month case reviews (item 26) and 12-month permanency hearings (item 27), the implementation of procedures to seek termination of parental rights (TPR) in accordance with the timeframes established in the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) (item 28), and the notification and inclusion of foster and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers in case reviews and hearings (item 29).

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. CFSR findings indicate that the State is not consistent in involving parents in the case planning process or in holding permanency hearings for children in foster care in a timely manner. Delays in permanency hearings were attributed in part to the fact that the courts do not take responsibility for tracking permanency hearing requirements, granting of continuances, scheduling problems due to overcrowded court dockets, and an insufficient number of DSS attorneys. Stakeholders also noted that the State is not consistently proceeding with the termination of parental rights in a timely manner and does not routinely provide notification of hearings to foster parents, preadoptive parents and relative caregivers or provide them with an opportunity to have input into the hearings. Despite these concerns, the CFSR did find that DSS is effective in ensuring that there is a process for a review of the status of each child in foster care at least every 6 months.

Quality Assurance System

The State's performance with regard to the systemic factor of Quality Assurance System is based on whether the State has developed standards to ensure the safety and health of children in foster care (item 30) and whether the State is operating a statewide quality

assurance system that evaluates the quality and effectiveness of services and measures program strengths and areas needing improvement (item 31).

South Carolina is in substantial conformity with this systemic factor. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure the protection of the health and safety of children in foster care and maintains a quality assurance system that evaluates and measures program strengths and areas needing improvement. However, it was noted that although the State has a QA process in place, the counties are only reviewed every 5 years (it used to be every 2 years), which may not be sufficient to ensure timely improvements in performance.

Training

The systemic factor of training incorporates an assessment of the State's new worker training program (item 32), ongoing training efforts for child welfare agency staff (item 33), and training for foster and adoptive parents (item 34).

South Carolina is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training because all Child Protection, Foster Care, Adoption, Managed Treatment Services, and Foster Care Licensing caseworkers must be certified through the Child Welfare Certification Training. Following orientation in the county, and before taking on case management responsibilities, new caseworkers receive three consecutive weeks of basic training through the *Child Welfare Training Academy* and must receive a 75 percent score on a test given after the training. In addition, DSS provides 14 hours preservice training to foster parents and requires foster parents to participate in 14 hours of training annually. However, the State no longer has a requirement that caseworkers must complete a specified number of training hours each year, although a calendar of training opportunities is made available to them.

Service Array

The assessment of the systemic factor of service array addresses three questions: (1) Does the State have in place an array of services that meet the needs of children and families served by the child welfare agency (item 35)? (2) Are these services accessible to families and children throughout the State (item 36)? And (3) Can services be individualized to meet the unique needs of the children and families served by the child welfare agency (item 37)?

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. The CFSR determined that the services available in the State are not adequate to enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency. In addition, the CFSR found that existing services are not consistently available throughout the State. Key services that were noted to be lacking were substance abuse treatment and quality mental health services.

Despite these concerns, the CFSR also determined that DSS is effective in tailoring services to meet the individual needs of children and families. Stakeholder comments indicated that DSS agencies have access to flexible funds and to programs that permit the individualization of services to meet the unique needs of children and families.

Agency Responsiveness to the Community

The systemic factor of agency responsiveness to the community incorporates the extent of the State's consultation with external stakeholders in developing the Child and Family Services Plan (items 38 and 39), and the extent to which the State coordinates child welfare services with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population (item 40).

South Carolina is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. CFSR findings indicate that there is broad collaboration with other agencies in the development of the goals and objectives for the State's Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) and that the State collaborates with internal and external partners in the development of the Annual Progress and Services Report for the CFSP. The CFSR also found that DSS services for children and families are coordinated with a range of Federal and federally assisted programs.

Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

The assessment of this systemic factor focuses on the State's standards for foster homes and child care institutions (items 41 and 42), the State's compliance with Federal requirements for criminal background checks for foster and adoptive parents (item 43), the State's efforts to recruit foster and adoptive parents that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of foster children (item 44), and the State's activities with regard to using cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate permanent placements for waiting children (item 45).

South Carolina is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. The CFSR found that all foster-family homes and child care institutions are uniformly required to meet the State's licensing and certification standards, and that criminal background checks and reviews of child maltreatment histories are consistently completed for foster families and child care institution staff. However, CFSR findings suggest that, although the State has in place a process for Statewide recruitment of foster and adoptive homes that reflect the needs of children requiring placement, there is no comprehensive plan for diligent recruitment that is implemented in the counties.

Table 1. CFSR Ratings for Safety and Permanency Outcomes and Items for South Carolina

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings			Item Ratings		
	<i>In Substantial Conformity?</i>	<i>Percent Substantially Achieved*</i>	<i>Met National Standards?</i>	<i>Rating**</i>	<i>Percent Strength</i>	<i>Met National Standards</i>
Safety Outcome 1-Children are first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.	Yes	91.8	Yes- All			
Item 1: Timeliness of investigations				Strength	100	
Item 2: Repeat maltreatment				Strength	92	Yes
Safety Outcome 2 – Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate.	No	71.4				
Item 3: Services to prevent removal				ANI	70	
Item 4: Risk of harm				ANI	76	
Permanency Outcome 1- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.	No	40.0	Met 2, did not meet 2			
Item 5: Foster care re-entry				Strength	87.5	Yes
Item 6: Stability of foster care placements				ANI	83	No
Item 7: Permanency goal for child				ANI	73	
Item 8: Reunification, guardianship, placement with relatives				ANI	62	Yes
Item 9: Adoption				ANI	23	No
Item 10: Other planned living arrangement				Strength	100	
Permanency Outcome 2 - The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved.	No	66.7				
Item 11: Proximity of placement				Strength	100	
Item 12: Placement with siblings				Strength	86	
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care				ANI	57	
Item 14: Preserving connections				ANI	75	
Item 15: Relative placement				ANI	71	
Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents				ANI	68	

*90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome for the State to be in substantial conformity with the outcome.

**Items may be rated as a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement (ANI)

Table 2. CFSR Ratings for Child and Family Well Being Outcomes and Items for South Carolina

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings		Item Ratings			
	<i>In Substantial Conformity?</i>	<i>Percent Substantially Achieved*</i>	<i>Met National Standards</i>	<i>Rating**</i>	<i>Percent Strength</i>	<i>Met National Standards</i>
Well Being Outcome 1 – Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs.	No	40.0				
Item 17: Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents				ANI	46	
Item 18: Child/family involvement in case planning				ANI	47	
Item 19: Worker visits with child				ANI	71	
Item 20: Worker visits with parents				ANI	46	
Well Being Outcome 2 – Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.	No	84.2				
Item 21: Educational needs of child				ANI	84.2	
Well Being Outcome 3 – Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.	No	68.8				
Item 22: Physical health of child				ANI	79	
Item 23: Mental health of child				ANI	76	

*90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome for the State to be in substantial conformity with the outcome.

**Items may be rated as a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement (ANI)

Table 3: South Carolina's Performance on the Six Outcome Measures for Which National Standards have been Established (2001 data)

Outcome Measure	National Standard	South Carolina Data
Of all children who were victims of a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report in the first 6 months of CY 2001, what percent were victims of another substantiated or indicated report within a 6-month period?	6.1% or less	3.4%
Of all children who were in foster care in the first 9 months of CY 2001, what percent experienced maltreatment from foster parents or facility staff members?	0.57% or less	0.51%
Of all children who entered foster care in FY 2001, what percent were re-entering care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode?	8.6% or less	6.6%
Of all children reunified from foster care in FY 2001, what percent were reunified within 12 months of entry into foster care?	76.2% or more	82.1%
Of all children who were adopted from foster care in FY 2001, what percent were adopted within 24 months of their entry into foster care?	32.0% or more	14.0%
Of all children in foster care during FY 2001 for less than 12 months, what percent experienced no more than 2 placement settings?	86.7% or more	76.0%

Table 4: CFSR Ratings for the Seven Systemic Factors for South Carolina

Systemic Factors	In Substantial Conformity?*	Rating
IV. Statewide Information System	Yes (3)	
Item 24: System can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location and goals of children in foster care		Strength
V. Case Review System	No (2)	
Item 25: Process for developing a case plan and for joint case planning with parents		ANI
Item 26: Process for 6-month case reviews		Strength
Item 27: Process for 12-month permanency hearings		ANI
Item 28: Process for seeking TPR in accordance with ASFA		ANI
Item 29: Process for notifying caregivers of reviews and hearings and for opportunity for them to be heard		ANI
VI. Quality Assurance System	Yes (3)	
Item 30: Standards to ensure quality services and ensure children’s safety and health		Strength
Item 31: Identifiable QA system that evaluates the quality of services and improvements		Strength
VII. Training	Yes (3)	
Item 32: Provision of initial staff training		Strength
Item 33: Provision of ongoing staff training that addresses the necessary skills and knowledge.		ANI
Item 34: Provision of training for caregivers and adoptive parents that addresses the necessary skills and knowledge		Strength
VIII. Service Array	No (2)	
Item 35: Availability of array of critical services		ANI
Item 36: Accessibility of services across all jurisdictions		ANI
Item 37: Ability to individualize services to meet unique needs		Strength
IX. Agency Responsiveness to the Community	Yes (3)	
Item 38: Engages in ongoing consultation with critical stakeholders in developing the CFSP		Strength
Item 39: Develops annual progress reports in consultation with stakeholders		Strength
Item 40: Coordinates services with other Federal programs		Strength
X. Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention	Yes (3)	
Item 41: Standards for foster family and child care institutions		Strength
Item 42: Standards are applied equally to all foster family and child care institutions		Strength
Item 43: Conducts necessary criminal background checks		Strength
Item 44: Diligent recruitment of foster and adoptive families that reflect children’s racial and ethnic diversity		ANI
Item 45: Uses cross-jurisdictional resources to find placements		Strength

*Systemic factors are rated on a scale from 1 to 4. A rating of 1 or 2 indicates “Not in Substantial Conformity.” A rating of 3 or 4 indicates Substantial Conformity.

** Individual items may be rated either as a Strength or as an Area Needing Improvement (ANI).

Introduction

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of South Carolina. The CFSR was conducted the week of June 23, 2003. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the State child welfare agency – the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS);
- The State Data Profile, prepared by the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which provides State child welfare data for the years 1999 through 2001;
- Reviews of 50 cases at three sites throughout the State;
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State-level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, and attorneys.

The key characteristics of the 50 cases reviewed are the following:

- Twenty-four cases were reviewed in Greenville County, 14 in Lexington County, and 12 in Marion County;
- All 50 cases had been open cases at some time during the period under review;
- 30 cases were “foster care cases” (cases in which children were in the care and custody of the State child welfare agency and in an out-of-home placement at some time during the period under review); and 20 were “in-home services cases” (cases in which families received services from the child welfare agency while children remained with their families, and no child in the family was in out-of-home care during the period under review);
- For the 30 foster care cases, 21 children (70%) were younger than age 10 at the start of the period under review; 2 children (7%) were at least 10 years old, but not yet 13 years old; and 7 children (23%) were 13 years of age and older at the start of the period under review;
- All children in the family were White in 28 cases (56%); all children in the family were Black in 21 cases (42%); and all children in the family were of two or more races in 1 case (2%);
- Of the 50 cases reviewed, the **primary** reason for the opening of a child welfare agency case was the following:
 - Neglect (not including medical neglect) – 19 cases (38%)
 - Physical abuse – 13 cases (26%)
 - Sexual abuse – 6 cases (12%)
 - Domestic violence in child’s home – 5 cases (10%)
 - Substance abuse of parents – 2 cases (4%)

- Mental/physical health of parent – 2 cases (4%)
 - Child relinquished by parents voluntarily – 2 cases (4%)
 - Child in juvenile justice system – 1 case (2%).
- Of the 50 cases reviewed, the most frequently cited of all reasons for children coming to the attention of the child welfare agency were the following:
 - Neglect (not including medical neglect) – 31 cases (62% of all cases);
 - Physical abuse – 19 cases (38% of all cases);
 - Sexual abuse – 13 cases (26% of all cases);
 - Substance abuse by parents – 12 cases (24% of all cases).
 - In 21 (70%) of the 30 foster care cases, the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and remained in care during the entire period under review.

The first section of the report presents the CFSR findings relevant to the State’s performance in achieving specific outcomes for children in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. The presentation for each outcome includes a table providing the key findings with regard to achievement of the outcome, a discussion of these findings, and a discussion of the findings relevant to each item (indicator) assessed. Findings generally are presented for all three counties taken together, although differences among counties are described when they are noteworthy. The second section of the report provides an assessment and discussion of the systemic factors relevant to the child welfare agency’s ability to achieve positive outcomes for children.

SECTION 1: OUTCOMES

I. SAFETY

Safety Outcome 1

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Greenville	Lexington	Marion	Total	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	21	13	11	45	91.8
Partially Achieved:	2	1	1	4	8.2
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	0	0	
Not Applicable:	1	0	0	1	
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard (%)	State's Percentage	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	
Repeat maltreatment	6.1 or less	3.4	X		
Maltreatment of children in foster care	.57 or less	0.51	X		

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 1

South Carolina achieved substantial conformity for Safety Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 91.8 percent of the cases reviewed, which is greater than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity;
- The State met the national standard for the percentage of children experiencing more than one substantiated or indicated child maltreatment report within a 6-month period;
- The State met the national standard for the percentage of children maltreated while in foster care.

The case review findings and stakeholder comments indicate that DSS caseworkers are consistent in responding to maltreatment reports in accordance with the State's required timeframes. This is a particularly noteworthy finding because DSS requires that a

response to high-risk reports must be initiated within 2 hours of receipt of the report (including establishing face-to-face contact with the child victim), and a response to moderate or low-risk reports must be initiated within 24 hours of receipt. Stakeholders noted that DSS provides 24-hour availability to receive maltreatment reports and that law enforcement and DSS work collaboratively in responding to reports.

Case reviews also found that repeat maltreatment, as it is measured for the CFSR (item 2), did not occur frequently. This is consistent with the State Data Profile indicating that South Carolina's incidence of maltreatment recurrence in FY 2001 was 3.4 percent, which meets the national standard for this measure of 6.1 percent or less.

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 1 are presented below.

Item 1: Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 18 of the 50 cases. Thirty-two cases were not applicable because they did not involve reports of child maltreatment during the period under review. In assessing item 1, reviewers were to determine whether the response to a maltreatment report occurring during the period under review had been initiated in accordance with the State child welfare agency requirements. The South Carolina DSS requires that caseworkers initiate a response and establish face-to-face contact with the children who are the subject of a maltreatment report in accordance with the following timeframes:

- Reports suggesting an emergency or high-risk situation – within 2 hours;
- Reports suggesting a moderate or low risk situation – within 24 hours.

The results of the case reviews were that all (100%) applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item.

An additional finding was that one of the 18 cases involving investigated maltreatment reports during the period under review was classified as an emergency or high-risk situation (requiring a response within 2 hours); the remaining maltreatment reports were classified as moderate or low-risk (requiring a response within 24 hours).

Stakeholders commenting on the issue of timeliness of investigations were in general agreement that DSS caseworkers respond to child maltreatment reports in accordance with the State's required time frames. Stakeholders in one county noted that there is a special unit that responds to "high risk" reports. However, State-level stakeholders indicated that a decrease in staff due to budget cuts

has raised concerns about whether the responding caseworker is sufficiently trained and experienced to conduct an effective investigation.

Determination and Discussion: Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 100 percent of the applicable cases, the agency initiated a response to a maltreatment report in accordance with the required time frames.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: The assessment of item 2 was applicable for 49 of the 50 cases. One foster care case was not applicable because there was never a substantiated or indicated child maltreatment report on any of the children in the family (the family voluntarily relinquished an adopted child). In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether there had ever been a substantiated report on the family. Reviewers also were to determine if there was at least one substantiated maltreatment report during the period under review, and if so, if another substantiated or indicated report occurred within 6 months of that report. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 2 was rated as a Strength in 45 (92%) of the 49 applicable cases (27 of which were foster care cases);
- Item 2 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 4 (8%) of the 49 applicable cases (2 of which were foster care cases).

Item 2 was rated as a Strength under the following circumstances:

- There was a substantiated maltreatment report involving the family prior to the period under review but no substantiated report during the period under review (34 cases);
- There was a substantiated maltreatment report involving the family during the period under review, but there was no substantiated report within 6 months of that report (11 cases).

Item 2 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in cases in which there was at least one substantiated or indicated report during the period under review that occurred within 6 months of another substantiated or indicated report.

The following are case review findings pertaining to the frequency of maltreatment reports on a family prior to and during the period under review for all 50 cases:

- In 1 case, there was no maltreatment report ever in the family;
- In 16 cases, there was only 1 maltreatment report on the family noted in the case file;
- In 28 cases, there were between 2 and 5 maltreatment reports;
- In 5 cases, there were between 6 and 8 maltreatment reports.

It is not known how many of these cases were substantiated or indicated.

Several stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that maltreatment recurrence is prevented by the agency's practice of developing and implementing safety plans immediately after the initial contact with the family. However, State-level stakeholders noted that a few counties have higher rates of maltreatment recurrence than are acceptable to DSS (and that exceed the national standard) and that the agency is helping these counties analyze their data to understand the reasons for the incidence of maltreatment recurrence. A few stakeholders expressed concern about a DSS policy that discourages making a formal report or conducting a formal investigation of specific types of maltreatment allegations when they occur on open cases.

Determination and Discussion: Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the following:

- The item was rated as a Strength in 92 percent of the cases reviewed;
- The State's rate of maltreatment recurrence for the year 2001 (3.4 percent), as reported in the State data profile, met the national standard of 6.1 percent or less.

According to the Statewide Assessment, although South Carolina met the national standard of 6.1 percent or less (based on 2001 data) for the percentage of children experiencing maltreatment recurrence, the rates for the 46 individual counties range from 0 percent to 11.9 percent with about 20 percent of the counties exceeding the national standard. It was noted in the Statewide Assessment that a low recurrence rate tends to be associated with the smaller rural counties. The Statewide Assessment indicates that there are two possible reasons for this finding. One possible reason is that in these counties, once a family becomes involved with child protection, sufficient local resources can be accessed to assist the family successfully. Another possibility is that once a family becomes involved with child protection, "any future concerns are simply handled less formally as part of the open treatment file."

With regard to this latter possibility, the Statewide Assessment notes that DSS has a consistent written policy regarding the screening of new intakes on open in-home treatment cases, trying to balance the need for a new investigation with the possibility that a new referral would be more appropriately handled in the context of the existing treatment. The Statewide Assessment notes that written policy is clear that a new allegation is not to be formally reported or investigated unless it meets one or more of the following criteria: (1) the nature of the new information requires a 24-hour child protective services (CPS) response by the treatment caseworker, (2) the nature of the report represents a potential impact for the child's safety, (3) the new report represents a clearly different incident, such

as sexual activity, which needs to be addressed through a new investigation, (4) the new report involves a newly identified perpetrator, or (5) the new report requires criminal or judicial intervention. The Statewide Assessment notes that a few counties have recurrence rates that are over three times the State rate, raising concerns about issues of local implementation of this written policy regarding intakes on open cases and whether families are being subjected to unnecessary re-investigations.

Safety Outcome 2

Safety Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Greenville	Lexington	Marion	Total	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	17	7	11	35	71.4
Partially Achieved:	2	3	1	6	12.2
Not Achieved or Addressed:	4	4	0	8	16.4
Not Applicable:	1	0	0	1	

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 2

South Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 71.4 percent of the cases reviewed, which does not meet the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity. Cases in Marion County were more likely to be rated as having substantially achieved this outcome (92%) than were cases in Greenville County (74%) or Lexington County (50%).

Although reviewers determined that in many cases DSS was effective in providing services to maintain children safely in their homes and in reducing the risk of harm to children, there was a substantial number of cases in which reviewers determined that DSS had not made sufficient efforts to ensure the safety of children, particularly when they remained in their homes. A key concern identified in these cases pertained to a lack of adequate assessment of the underlying problems in the family, which in turn resulted in a lack of provision of the services necessary to address the risk of harm to children and ensure children’s safety.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 2 are presented and discussed below.

Item 3. Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: There were 33 cases for which an assessment of item 3 was applicable. Seventeen cases were excluded from this assessment because the children entered foster care prior to the period under review, remained in foster care during the period under review, and/or there were no identified risks of harm to the children in the home during the period under review. For this item, reviewers assessed whether, in responding to a substantiated maltreatment report or risk of harm, the agency made diligent efforts to provide services to families to prevent removal of children from their homes while at the same time ensuring their safety. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 3 was rated as a Strength in 23 (70%) of the 33 applicable cases (8 of which were foster care cases);
- Item 3 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 10 (30%) of the 33 applicable cases (5 of which were foster care cases).

Cases in Marion County were more likely to be rated as a Strength for this item (86%) than were cases in Greenville County (71%) or Lexington County (56%).

Cases were rated as a Strength for this item based on the following determinations:

- Appropriate services were provided to the parents and child to prevent removal, including removal of the perpetrator from the home (14 cases);
- Appropriate services were provided to the parents while the child was in a voluntary placement with a relative (2 cases);
- The family received appropriate post-reunification services to prevent another removal (3 cases);
- The children were appropriately removed from the home to ensure their safety (4 cases).

Services provided to the families included, but were not limited to, housing services, intensive home-based family preservation services, medication monitoring for children and parents, mental health services (including family therapy), counseling, parenting classes, caseworker monitoring, sexual abuse counseling, supervised visitation with perpetrators, transportation services, domestic violence counseling, anger management services, substance abuse treatment services, assistance in acquiring basic living skills (for a mildly retarded mother), respite day care, and services to address developmental disabilities (for children and parents).

This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- Services were provided but they did not match the family’s needs because the assessment was not sufficiently comprehensive (4 cases);
- Services to prevent removal or another entry into foster care should have been provided, but were not (6 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that DSS generally makes concerted efforts to keep children out of foster care and has access to sufficient in-home services to accomplish this objective when appropriate. State-level stakeholders, however, expressed concern that the availability of placement prevention services is declining because of budget cuts in the agency. This was confirmed by Greenville County stakeholders, who reported that the availability of in-home services has declined recently and families now wait as long as three months to receive some in-home services. Several stakeholders also noted that unless the family is eligible for Medicaid, they must pay for most services, and this often is problematic for families who have limited financial resources.

Some stakeholders reported that the agency prevents placements of children in foster care through voluntary placements with relatives. Although this practice was generally praised, several stakeholders expressed concern that the agency does not provide sufficient supportive services to relative caregivers. Stakeholders also expressed concern that the potential for risk of harm in the relative home is not always adequately assessed before placement.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 30 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DSS had not made diligent efforts to provide the necessary services to maintain children safely in their own homes. A key concern identified was that underlying service needs were not identified in the assessments, resulting in a failure to provide adequate services to the family to ensure children’s safety. In some cases, this resulted in the eventual removal of children from their homes in situations in which removal may not have been necessary.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the volume of cases open for in-home treatment services can make it difficult to provide sufficient intensive services, particularly because these cases are “competing for scarce resources with the more prescriptive foster care services.” It should be noted, however, that the on-site review identified concerns regarding the length of time in-home treatment cases are being kept open for services. Stakeholders in one county noted that in-home services cases in that county tend to be open for very long periods of time, sometimes up to 12 years. They suggested that for many caseworkers, there is a lack of understanding of their role with the family, and they do not know when it is appropriate to close a case. However, stakeholders in another county said that in-home cases are re-evaluated if they are open for more than 12 months. For the in-home services cases reviewed during the onsite CFSR, 11 cases were open for under 1 year, 5 cases were open between 1 and 2 years, 4 cases were open for longer than 2 years, and 1 case was open for 11 years.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that in some areas, there is a lack of access to services in the community. Although in recent years DSS was able to increase service availability through use of TANF funds, interagency agreements, and contracted services, the economic downturn and cuts in agency budgets have caused a loss of programs and resources.

Item 4. Risk of harm to child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 4 was applicable for 49 cases. One case was not assessed for this item because the adoptive parents voluntarily relinquished their parental rights prior to the period under review. In assessing item 4, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to reduce the risk of harm to the children involved in each case. The assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 4 was rated as a Strength in 37 (76%) of the 49 applicable cases (24 of which were foster care cases);
- Item 4 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 12 (24%) of the 49 applicable cases (5 of which were foster care cases).

In Marion County, 100 percent of the 12 applicable cases were rated as a Strength for this item, compared to 78 percent of the 23 applicable cases in Greenville County and 50 percent of the 14 applicable cases in Lexington County.

Cases were rated as a Strength for this item when reviewers determined the following:

- The risk of harm to children was appropriately managed by removing the children from home either prior to or during the period under review and providing services to the parents to reduce risk of harm (16 cases);
- The risk of harm to children was appropriately addressed by removing the children from the home either prior to or during the period under review and seeking termination of parental rights (TPR) (6 cases);
- The risk of harm to children was appropriately managed by providing services to families to address risk concerns while the children remain in the home (14 cases);
- The risk of harm was appropriately managed by an informal temporary placement with relatives while services were provided to parents (1 case).

This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The services necessary to reduce risk of harm to the child were not provided because the family assessment was not sufficiently comprehensive to identify underlying risk factors (9 cases);
- The agency did not monitor the family to ensure child’s safety and ongoing service participation (2 cases);
- The child was exposed to risk due to unsupervised visitation with a parent (1 case).

Many stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that DSS is generally effective in addressing risk of harm to children. They noted that for the most part safety plans are implemented shortly after the initial contact with the family, the safety plans address the key risk issues, and the agency usually provides the services necessary to address identified risks. State-level stakeholders suggested that addressing risk of harm has improved since DSS implemented required training (provided by the National Resource Center on Child Maltreatment) for all staff on safety and risk assessment. Stakeholders in one county noted that DSS uses a family matrix that helps them assess cause of risk by assessing family dynamics.

Other stakeholders, however, expressed concern about the lack of consistent ongoing assessment and ongoing monitoring of families while children remain in the home. Stakeholders also voiced concern about the lack of adequate assessment of relative families prior to placement of a child in a relative’s home either to prevent entry into foster care or as a placement resource for children in foster care.

State-level stakeholders reported that a CPS unit in the central office is responsible for investigations of child maltreatment in foster family care or in placement facilities. These stakeholders also said that the agency works closely with foster parents on safety issues and encourages foster parents to use respite care if they need support. Although State-level stakeholders reported that there is a 24-hour foster care hotline for foster care children, other stakeholders indicated that not all foster children are aware of the existence of this hotline.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 24 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DSS had not adequately addressed the risk of harm to the children. A key concern pertained to the lack of comprehensive assessments, which resulted in families not receiving services that were adequate to reduce the risk of harm to children. For example, in one case, the assessment failed to identify a domestic violence problem in the family.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DSS uses the *Family Assessment Matrix*, which is designed to identify strengths and needs of children and families through an on-going assessment process. The assessment includes a child safety and risk assessment and assessment of family functioning, among other components. The Statewide Assessment also notes, however, that a DSS program review revealed that once the initial assessment and treatment plan are completed, there may be a lack of recognition of changes in ongoing safety and risk issues, even though policy requires a formal update of the family assessment every 6 months. Safety

assessment and family assessment documents, case plans and treatment evaluation forms have recently been redesigned to prompt for documentation of improved child safety and parental functioning. In addition, the Statewide Assessment indicates that tracking and monitoring of informal relative placements without agency custody is a significant gap in the State’s information management system (CAPSS), and that DSS recently revised policy to require assessment of the home, provision of services, and judicial review if extended.

II. PERMANENCY

Permanency Outcome 1

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Greenville	Lexington	Marion	Total	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	4	4	4	12	40.0
Partially Achieved:	9	4	3	16	53.3
Not Achieved or Addressed:	2	0	0	2	6.7
Not Applicable:	9	6	5		
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard (%)	State’s Percentage	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	
Foster care re-entries	8.6	6.6	X		
Length of time to achieve reunification	76.2	82.1	X		
Length of time to achieve adoption	32.0 or more	14.0		X	
Stability of foster care placements	86.7 or more	76.0		X	

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME P1

South Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 40.0 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity;

- The State Data Profile indicates that for Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2001, the State did not meet the national standards for (1) the length of time to achieve adoption, and (2) the percentage of children in foster care for 12 months or less who experienced no more than 2 placements.

The State did meet the national standards for the percentage of children in FFY 2001 who (1) were reunified within 12 months of entry into foster care and (2) re-entered foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode.

With respect to permanency outcome 1, the CFSR case review found that DSS is usually effective in preventing re-entry into foster care (item 5) and providing appropriate services to youth who are transitioning from foster care to independent living (item 10). However, the CFSR case reviews also found that a substantial percentage of children in foster care do not experience stability in their living arrangements (item 6), and that appropriate permanency goals are not uniformly established in a timely manner (item 7).

Another CFSR case review finding is that in 38 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DSS had not made concerted efforts to achieve reunification in a timely manner. This finding is not consistent with data reported in the State data profile indicating that the State’s percent of reunifications within 12 months of the child’s entry into foster care met the national standard for that measure. In addition, case reviewers determined that in 77 percent of the applicable cases, DSS had not made the necessary efforts to achieve adoptions in a timely manner. A primary concern identified for adoption pertained to extensive delays in the agency filing for TPR, as well as court-related delays due to overcrowded court dockets and the granting of continuances for TPR hearings.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 1 are presented below.

Item 5. Foster care re-entries

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Eight of the 30 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of foster care re-entries because they involved children who entered foster care at some time during the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the entry into foster care during the period under review occurred within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 5 was rated as a Strength in 7 (87.5%) of the 8 applicable cases;
- Item 5 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 1 (12.5%) of the 8 applicable cases.

Cases were rated as a Strength for this item when it was determined that the entry into foster care during the period under review did not take place within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode. Case reviewers noted that in almost all of the cases reviewed in which a child had been reunified with parents during the period under review, the agency provided post-reunification services to support the reintegration of the family.

Stakeholders commenting on this item were in general agreement that the rate of foster care re-entry in the State is fairly low. Several stakeholders attributed this to the reunification process. They noted that prior to reunification, there is a comprehensive assessment of family stability, including a consultation with therapists involved with the family. In addition, visitation is gradually extended as the family moves closer to reunification. Finally, once physical reunification is achieved, the agency continues to work with and monitor the family for 3 to 6 months before transferring custody.

Determination and Discussion: Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the following:

- In 87.5 percent of the cases reviewed, the child’s entry into foster care during the period under review was not within 12 months of a prior foster care episode;
- Data from the State Data Profile indicate that South Carolina’s re-entry rate for FY 2001 (6.6%) meets the national standard of 8.6 percent or less.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Twenty-nine of the 30 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of Item 6. One case was not applicable for assessment because the child was in “runaway status” during the entire period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the child experienced multiple placement settings during the period under review and, if so, whether the changes in placement settings were necessary to achieve the child’s permanency goal or meet the child’s service needs. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 6 was rated as a Strength in 24 (83%) of the 29 applicable cases;
- Item 6 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 5 (17%) of the 29 applicable cases.

Cases in Lexington County (100%) and Marion County (86%) were more likely to be rated as a Strength for this item than were cases in Greenville County (71%).

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- Children in 19 cases experienced only 1 placement during the period under review (no placement changes);
- Children in 5 cases experienced 2 placements during the period under review;
- Children in 5 cases experienced 3 placements during the period under review.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item when reviewers determined that the child did not experience a placement change during the period under review (19 cases), or that the placement changes experienced were in the child's best interest (5 cases), such as a placement change that brought the child closer to family members, or a placement change that was necessary to meet the child's treatment needs.

A rating of Area Needing Improvement for this item was assigned when reviewers determined the following:

- A child's placement in a shelter for an extensive time period was unnecessary and created instability for the child (2 cases);
- The child's placement change was due to behavior problems or problems in the foster home and the agency had not made a concerted effort to address the problem prior to placement disruption (2 cases);
- The child's current placement was determined to be unstable (1 case).

Stakeholders commenting on this item expressed differing opinions. Some stakeholders suggested that most children in foster care do not experience placement stability. They attributed this primarily to the scarcity of foster homes, which results in inadequate matching of children and foster care placements. A few stakeholders also noted that foster parents usually are not sufficiently trained to meet the needs of the children placed in their care and do not receive sufficient supports from the agency to assist them in meeting those needs.

Other stakeholders expressed the opinion that most foster children are in stable placements and that the agency is effective in matching children's needs with appropriate foster care placements. A few stakeholders reported that placing children in a shelter at the time of entry into foster care allows the agency sufficient time to assess needs and find an appropriate match for a child, even though it ensures that the child will experience at least 2 placements shortly after entering foster care. State-level stakeholders indicated that although shelter care is available in most counties, it is not available everywhere in the State. In addition, case review findings indicate that children may be kept in shelters for extensive periods of time because of a lack of appropriate placement resources.

Determination and Discussion: Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the following:

- In 17 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that children experienced placement changes that did not promote attainment of their goals or meet their treatment needs;
- Data from the State Data Profile for FFY 2001 indicate that the percentage of children experiencing no more than 2 placements in their first 12 months in foster care (76.0%) does not meet the national standard of 86.7 percent or more.

According to the Statewide Assessment, children frequently have two placement settings within the first few months of care because they have an initial shelter placement. The Statewide Assessment also notes that a common reason for placement change is when a request is made for a child to receive more intensive services. In addition, foster parents surveyed as part of the Statewide Assessment identified children's behaviors as the primary reason for disruptions in placements. The Statewide Assessment indicates that DSS plans to increase the required training for initial foster parent licensure, and provide additional training for foster parents who wish to foster children with special emotional and behavioral problems.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: All 30 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 7. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 7 was rated Strength in 22 (73%) of the 30 applicable cases;
- Item 7 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 8 (27%) of the 30 applicable cases.

Similar to item 6, cases in Lexington County (100%) and Marion County (86%) were substantially more likely to be rated as a Strength for this item than were cases in Greenville County (53%).

The case review found that the children in the 30 foster care cases had the following “most recent” permanency goals at the time of the case review:

- 13 children had a goal of adoption;
- 13 children had a goal of reunification;

- 4 children had a goal of long-term foster care/emancipation.

At the time of the on-site review, 16 of the 30 children in the foster care cases had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. TPR had been filed in nine of these cases. A reason for not filing was found in only one of the case files for the remaining seven cases.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item when reviewers determined that the child's permanency goal was appropriate and had been established in a timely manner. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The goal was appropriate but was not established in a timely manner (e.g., an adoption goal was established only after a reunification goal had been maintained for too long without any concurrent effort toward adoption) (2 cases);
- The goal is not appropriate because it is not realistic given the information on the case (e.g., reunification with a mother who has not shown evidence of attempting to meet the case plan requirements) (2 cases);
- Child's goal of adoption is appropriate but the child has been in care for more than 15 of the most recent 22 months and a TPR petition had not been filed and no reason was provided in the case file for not seeking TPR (6 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this item generally expressed the opinion that DSS is not consistent in establishing appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner. Some stakeholders noted that the goal of reunification is maintained for "too long" a period of time without concurrent planning. A few stakeholders reported that there are delays in agency filing for TPR, and some key stakeholders were not aware that the agency is supposed to file for TPR if the child has been in care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, or is to provide a justification for not seeking TPR.

Most stakeholders were in agreement that the agency does not engage in concurrent planning. Although State-level stakeholders said that concurrent planning is part of DSS policy and that most caseworkers receive training in the practice, other stakeholders noted that concurrent planning is not taking place, and some agency caseworkers are not familiar with the term. Stakeholders reported that, except in unusual circumstances, the general practice is to work toward reunification for the first 12 months, and to consider adoption at the end of the 12 months if efforts to reunify have not been successful. In addition, stakeholders reported that if the child is older than 14 years old, the goal of long term foster care usually is established if reunification is not possible. A few stakeholders expressed the opinion that sometimes the delays in achieving TPR are so extensive, that long-term foster care becomes the case goal almost by default.

Determination and Discussion: Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 27 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not established an appropriate goal for the child in a timely manner. The key concern pertained to not filing for TPR when a child had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months and not providing a reason in the case record for why TPR was not being sought.

Item 8. Reunification, Guardianship, or Permanent Placement with Relatives

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Item 8 was applicable for 13 of the 30 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had achieved the goals of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives for children in a timely manner or, if the goals had not been achieved, whether the agency had made, or was in the process of making, diligent efforts to achieve the goals. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 8 was rated as a Strength in 8 (62%) of the 13 applicable cases;
- Item 8 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 5 (38%) of the 13 applicable cases.

Cases were more likely to be rated as a Strength for this item in Marion County (100%) than in Lexington County (67%) or Greenville County (50%).

For the 13 cases with a goal of reunification, the goal had been achieved in 7 cases, and in 6 of those cases, the goal was achieved within 12 months. Four of the 6 children who were not reunified during the period under review had been in foster care for 12 months or more; the remainder had been in foster care for less than 12 months.

Cases were rated as a Strength for this item when reviewers determined that the goal had been achieved in a timely manner or that the agency was making concerted efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the agency had not made adequate efforts to achieve the goal of reunification in a timely manner. In four of these cases, the child had been in foster care for more than 12 months. In one case, the child had not been in foster care for 12 months, but the agency had placed the child with a relative, and case reviewers determined that nothing was being done to promote reunification with the parents.

Most stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that the agency focuses on reunification and is effective in facilitating reunifications as a result of strong assessments and treatment planning. In one county, stakeholders noted that there are mentor therapeutic foster parents who work closely with birth parents to help achieve reunification.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although data from the State Data Profile indicate that for FFY 2001, the State's percentage of reunifications occurring within 12 months of entry into foster care (82.1%) meets the national standard of 76.2 percent or more, case reviewers determined that for children with a goal of reunification, the agency had not made diligent efforts to achieve the goals of reunification in a timely manner in 38 percent of the 12 applicable cases. It is necessary for the criteria for both measures to be met for this item to be rated as a Strength.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DSS emphasizes the coordination between child welfare services and Family Independence services (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families [TANF]) to ensure that families and children receive available financial benefits to support and maintain reunification. In addition, post-reunification services include assistance in identifying and using community resources.

Item 9: Adoption

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Thirteen of the 30 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 9. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether diligent efforts had been, or were being, made to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. The results were the following:

- Item 9 was rated as a Strength in 3 (23%) of the 13 applicable cases;
- Item 9 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 10 (77%) of the 13 applicable cases.

The adoption was finalized in 6 of the 13 cases in which the child's permanency goal was adoption. In one of those 6 cases, the finalization occurred within 24 months of the child's entry into foster care. In 7 of the 13 applicable cases, adoption had not been finalized by the end of the period under review, but only 2 children were in adoptive placements.

This item was assigned a rating of Strength when reviewers determined that the State had achieved a finalized adoption in a timely manner (1 case) or was making concerted efforts to ensure that the adoption occurred in a timely manner (2 cases). The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- An appropriate potential adoptive family was not located early enough in the case (1 case);
- There were agency-related delays pertaining to delays in transferring cases to adoption caseworkers and filing for TPR (9 cases);
- There were court-related delays due to the lengthiness of the TPR process and the granting of multiple continuances for TPR hearings (5 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this item were in agreement that adoptions are not taking place in a timely manner. Stakeholders noted that one reason for this is that the agency does not file for TPR in a timely manner, due to problems such as staff turnover and the loss of agency attorneys as a result of budget cuts. Other reasons for delays in adoption noted by stakeholders were: (1) a lack of concurrent planning; (2) the reluctance of many judges to terminate parental rights; and (3) an insufficient amount of court time allocated to TPR hearings and appeals. Some stakeholders noted that the agency is moving toward a one-study format for foster homes and adoptive homes with the goal of expediting the adoptions of children by their foster parents.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the following:

- Data from the State Data Profile indicate that in FY 2001, the State's percentage of finalized adoptions occurring within 24 months of the child's entry into foster care (14.0%) does not meet the national standard of 32.0 or more;
- In 77 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the State had not made concerted efforts to achieve an adoption in a timely manner. A key concern identified through the case reviews pertained to agency-related delays in filing for TPR and court-related delays in holding TPR hearings.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the following practices would enhance DSS efforts to achieve adoptions in a timely manner:

- Earlier identification of TPR/Adoption as the appropriate plan;
- Timely completion of TPR;
- More effective implementation of concurrent planning;
- Addressing Court continuances, Court time availability, case priority of attorneys, and preparation of cases for Court;
- Better coordination with county legal staff;
- Tracking the key steps in the process to move a child into a permanent adoptive family.

Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Four of the foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 10. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine if the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to assist children in attaining their goals related to other planned permanent living arrangements. The results of the assessment were that all 4 cases (100%) were rated as a Strength for this item. Case reviewers noted that for the most part, DSS is providing the necessary services to these children to assist them in making a successful transition from foster care to independent living.

Some stakeholders commenting on item 10 reported that the agency is doing a better job now than it has in the past in assisting children in making the transition to independent living; other stakeholders expressed the opinion that DSS is not providing the necessary services to these children. A few stakeholders voiced concern about the practice of automatically establishing a goal of long-term foster care for children who are age 14 or older.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 100 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to ensure that the child’s placement was long-term and stable and that the child was receiving appropriate services to assist in the eventual transition to independent living.

Permanency Outcome 2

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Greenville	Lexington	Marion	Total	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	10	6	4	20	66.7
Partially Achieved:	4	2	3	9	30.0
Not Achieved or Addressed:	1	0	0	1	3.3
Not Applicable:	9	6	5		

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2

South Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 66.7 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

The CF SR case reviews found that DSS is highly effective in placing children in close proximity to their parents and/or close relatives and in ensuring that siblings are placed together while in foster care, unless separation is deemed necessary to meet at least one child's needs. However, a key CF SR finding was that DSS is not consistently effective in promoting visitation between children in foster care with their parents or with their siblings in foster care. In addition, case reviewers determined that DSS was not consistent in making concerted efforts to (1) seek relatives as placement resources, (2) preserve children's connections to extended families and to their culture and community, and (3) promote the relationship between children and their parents. The key concerns identified were: (1) DSS does not provide sufficient support for children's relationships with their fathers, either through visitation or through other means of preserving connections, and (2) DSS does not routinely support and facilitate visitation among siblings when siblings are separated while in foster care.

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 2 are presented and discussed below.

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Of the 30 foster care cases, 25 were applicable for an assessment of item 11. Cases determined to be not applicable were those in which (1) TPR had been attained prior to the period under review, (2) contact with parents was not considered to be in the child's best interest, and/or (3) parents were deceased or whereabouts were unknown. In assessing item 11, reviewers were to determine whether the child's most current foster care setting was in close proximity to the child's parents or close relatives. The results of this assessment were that all 25 cases (100%) were rated as a Strength for this item.

The cases were rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- Child was placed in the same community as parents or relatives (14 cases);
- Child's out-of-county placement was necessary to meet the child's needs (11 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this item were in general agreement that DSS attempts to keep children in their “home” communities while they are in foster care. However, stakeholders also expressed concern that in many counties, if a therapeutic or group home is needed, the children almost always have to be placed out of county because of lack of resources.

Determination and Discussion: Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 100 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DSS had made diligent efforts to ensure that children were in foster care placements that were in close proximity to their parents or relatives, or, if not in close proximity, were necessary to meet special needs.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DSS’ goal is to maintain children in their own communities and school districts. The Statewide Assessment notes that 26.3 percent of all children in foster care in CY 2002 were placed out of their home county for at least one placement event, with almost 59 percent being placed there for reasons other than therapeutic or adoptive placements. The Statewide Assessment also indicates that county self-assessments and implementation of Casey Family to Family strategies are addressing the placing of children within their home community or county.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Twenty-one of the 30 foster care cases involved a child with siblings who were in foster care. In assessing item 12, reviewers were to determine whether siblings were, or had been, placed together and, if not, whether the separation was necessary to meet the needs (service or safety needs) of one or more of the children. This assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 12 was rated as a Strength in 18 (86%) of the 21 applicable cases;
- Item 12 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 3 (14%) of the 21 applicable cases.

Cases were rated as a Strength for this item if the child was in placement with all of his or her siblings (8 cases), or if the separation of the siblings was deemed necessary to meet at least one child’s special needs or to ensure a sibling’s safety (10 cases).

Cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item when reviewers determined that the separation of siblings in foster care was due to a lack of effort on the part of DSS to find a placement to accommodate the sibling group, even when the sibling group was no larger than 3 children.

Some stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that siblings usually are placed together; other stakeholders, however, indicated that siblings often are not placed together. Some stakeholders noted that when adoption of siblings as a group is the goal, the children are almost always placed together. However, other stakeholders indicated that adoption takes precedence over placement with siblings and, if an adoptive family is found for one child, that child will be placed separately from siblings.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 86 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DSS had made diligent efforts to place siblings together in foster care in situations in which separation was not necessary to meet the needs of at least one of the siblings. According to the Statewide Assessment, the use of shelters as a placement resource allows sibling groups to be maintained together during the crisis period following removal.

Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 13 was applicable for 21 of the 30 foster care cases. Nine cases were not applicable for an assessment of this item because TPR had been established prior to the period under review, parents were no longer involved in the children's lives, and/or the child had no siblings in foster care. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine (1) whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to facilitate visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings in foster care and (2) whether these visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of children and families. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 13 was rated as a Strength in 12 (57%) of the 21 applicable cases;
- Item 13 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 9 (43%) of the 21 applicable cases.

Typical visitation between children and their mothers for the 16 cases for which this assessment was applicable was the following:

- Weekly visits – 5 cases;
- Twice a month visits – 6 cases;
- Monthly visits – 3 cases;
- Less than monthly visits – 1 case;
- No visits – 1 case.

For the two cases in which visits with mother occurred less frequently than once a month, reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation. Both of those cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this reason.

Typical visitation between children and their fathers for the 10 cases for which this assessment was applicable was the following:

- Weekly visits – 4 cases;
- Twice a month visits - 3 cases;
- Less than monthly visits – 1 case;
- No visits – 2 cases.

In two of the three cases in which visits with the father occurred less frequently than once a month, reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation. Both of those cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement for that reason.

Visitation between siblings was applicable in 12 cases in which siblings were not placed together in foster care. Typical visitation between siblings was the following:

- Weekly – 1 case;
- Twice a month visits – 4 cases;
- Less than monthly visits - 4 cases;
- No visits – 3 cases.

In all seven of the cases in which sibling visits occurred less frequently than once a month, reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation. All seven of these cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue generally agreed that visitation among siblings is not occurring with necessary frequency. Some stakeholders noted that it is rare that the agency will establish a regular visitation pattern for siblings, and it is usually left up to the foster parents to initiate the visits. A few stakeholders suggested that the frequency of visitation among siblings is due to the large caseloads that caseworkers carry.

In contrast, most stakeholders expressed the opinion that visitation with parents does occur on a regular basis and that most children see their parents about once a month.

Determination and Discussion: Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 43 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to ensure that visitation was of sufficient frequency to meet the needs of the child. A key identified concern pertained to a lack of effort on the part of the agency to promote visitation among siblings in foster care.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DSS policy states that visits between child and parents and siblings will be arranged within 3 working days of placement and that ongoing visitation is recommended twice per month. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the Visitation Contract stipulates the frequency of visitation, and written notification is given to parents if there are changes in visitation.

Item 14. Preserving connections

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Item 14 was applicable for assessment in 28 of the 30 foster care cases. One case was determined to be not applicable because the child had been in “runaway status” during the entire period under review. The other case was determined to be not applicable because the child entered care from the hospital as a newborn, and there were no significant familial connections to preserve. In assessing item 14, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to preserve the child's connections to neighborhood, community, heritage, family, faith, and friends while the child was in foster care. The assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 14 was rated as a Strength in 21 (75%) of the 28 applicable cases;
- Item 14 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 7 (25%) of the 28 applicable cases.

Cases were rated as a Strength for this item when reviewers determined that the child’s primary connections had been “significantly” preserved while they were in foster care. For the most part, reviewers noted that DSS was effective in preserving connections with parents (9 cases), siblings (12 cases), and extended family (8 cases). In a few cases, reviewers noted that DSS had assisted the child in preserving connections to his or her heritage and community, as well as to significant others in their lives, such as former foster parents and therapists.

Cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item when reviewers determined that the child's connections had only been "partially" preserved (3 cases) or had been "not at all" preserved (4 cases). In 4 cases, reviewers determined that DSS had not assisted the child in maintaining connections with former foster parents, and in 3 cases, reviewers determined that connections had not been maintained with siblings.

Many stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that DSS makes concerted efforts to keep children connected to extended family and community, while other stakeholders voiced concern that DSS does not assist children in maintaining connections to extended family or friends. Some stakeholders noted that although the agency is effective in preserving connections to parents, siblings, and extended family, more effort is needed to preserve connections with non-relatives.

Although none of the cases reviewed involved a Native American child, stakeholders noted that DSS and the Catawba Tribe have a positive working relationship and have developed practices to ensure that Native American children in State foster care remain connected to their traditions and culture. Stakeholders indicated that the Tribe routinely receives notification if a child from the Tribe enters foster care and if there is a court hearing. Stakeholders said that the Tribe looks for family members as a first placement option and then seeks a Native American home. However, if no Native American home is available, the Tribe will approve use of a non-Native home. Stakeholders indicated that if a child is placed in a non-Native home, the Tribe makes regular visits to the home to keep the child connected. In addition, the Tribe has a festival every year and invites foster parents caring for Native American children.

Determination and Discussion: Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 25 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DSS had not made diligent efforts to preserve children's connections.

The Statewide Assessment notes that DSS promotes preserving connections for Native American children with their Tribe and their heritage through a collaboration with the Catawba Indian Nation to develop the following:

- A cultural program for foster care youth to allow a connection to be maintained with their heritage;
- A recruitment plan for developing Native American foster family homes;
- A cultural competency training curriculum for all foster parents in the county adjacent to the tribe;
- Agency funding for a Native American mentor youth in care;
- After care services for Native American children.

Item 15. Relative placement.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Item 15 was applicable for assessment in 28 of the 30 foster care cases. Two cases were not applicable for assessment because at entry into foster care the child had treatment needs that precluded the possibility of relative placement both at that time and in the future. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives (both maternal and paternal relatives) as potential placement resources for children in foster care. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 15 was rated as a Strength in 20 (71%) of the 28 applicable cases;
- Item 15 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 8 (29%) of the 28 applicable cases.

Cases were rated as a Strength for this item when reviewers determined that the child's most recent placement was with relatives (5 cases), or that the agency had made diligent efforts to search for both maternal and paternal relatives (15 cases). In these latter cases, children were not placed with relatives for a variety of reasons including the relative's inability to care for the children, their lack of interest in becoming care providers, their physical distance from the family, and/or their criminal records or history of substantiated child maltreatment.

Cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item when reviewers determined the following:

- The agency had not made diligent efforts to search for maternal relatives (4 cases);
- The agency had not made diligent efforts to search for paternal relatives (2 cases);
- The agency had not made diligent efforts to search for either maternal or paternal relatives (1 case).

One case was rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item because although both maternal and paternal relatives had been sought, reviewers determined that the child's placement with a paternal grandparent was inappropriate due to a criminal history and health complications of this grandparent. Therefore, the agency had not done an adequate assessment of the relatives.

Stakeholders commenting on this item held differing opinions. Some stakeholders suggested that the agency makes concerted efforts to seek relatives as placement resources; other stakeholders reported that the agency does not routinely search for relatives. However, most stakeholders agreed that DSS does not provide relative caregivers with sufficient services to support the placements. State-level

stakeholders said that generally relatives do not want to be involved with DSS, although they often want court-ordered custody of the children. These stakeholders suggested that relatives usually refuse licensure and any offer of supportive services.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 29 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DSS had not made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources.

According to the Statewide Assessment, preference must be for relatives at initial placement and consideration of relative placement incorporated into the case plan. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, in November 2002, 8 percent of children in foster care were with relatives. The agency has established the following procedures to ensure consideration of relative placement:

- Within 3 days of placement a diligent search for any absent parent must take place;
- During the Planning Conference prior to the removal hearing, parents are to be questioned to determine any relatives previously ruled out or not considered who may be placement resources;
- Relatives may be licensed as foster parents, and some requirements can be waived on a case-by-case basis if not a safety issue;
- Emergency approval procedures for relative placements have been established and include a study of safety factors.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 16 was applicable for 22 of the 30 foster care cases. A case was considered not applicable for an assessment of this item if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review, and parents were no longer involved with the child, or if a relationship with the parents was considered to not be in the child's best interests. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to support or maintain the bond between children in foster care and their mothers and fathers. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 16 was rated as a Strength in 15 (68%) of the 22 applicable cases;
- Item 16 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 7 (32%) of the 22 applicable cases.

This item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency promoted the parent-child relationship by facilitating and encouraging frequent visitation and providing transportation for visitation when necessary (15 cases);

- The agency promoted the parent-child relationship by involving parents in the child’s medical appointments (2 cases);
- The agency promoted the parent-child relationship by involving parents with the child in recreational and school activities (2 cases).

Cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item when reviewers determined the following:

- There was a need for more therapeutic visitation arrangements to promote the parent-child relationship (i.e., there was a lot of conflict during visitation that was not addressed by the agency) (2 cases);
- There was a lack of effort on the part of DSS to support or promote visitation (5 cases).

Most stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that DSS does attempt to promote the parent child relationship. State-level stakeholders noted that foster parents are encouraged to engage with biological parents and serve as role models for the parents. Lexington County stakeholders reported that the agency encourages birthday celebrations involving parents and encourages parents to attend doctors or counseling appointments with their children. However, these stakeholders also suggested that the agency could improve on its efforts to involve fathers, particularly non-custodial fathers, in these activities.

Determination and Discussion: Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because reviewers determined that in 32 percent of the applicable cases, the agency had not made concerted efforts to support the parent-child relationships of children in foster care. A key concern identified was that when parents did not initiate or request visitation with their children, reviewers determined that DSS did not necessarily encourage more frequent visitation or provide services to address the parent’s reluctance regarding visitation.

III. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Well Being Outcome 1

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Greenville	Lexington	Marion	Total	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	7	5	8	20	40.0
Partially Achieved:	11	4	4	19	38.0
Not Achieved or Addressed:	6	5	0	11	22.0
Not Applicable:	0	0	0		

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1

South Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 40.0 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.

Although achievement of Well-Being Outcome 1 was low in all counties, Marion County cases were more likely to be rated as having substantially achieved this outcome (67%) than Lexington County (36%) or Greenville County (29%) cases.

The CFSR case reviews resulted in ratings of Area Needing Improvement for all of the indicators of Well-Being Outcome 1. Reviewers determined that DSS was not consistent in assessing and addressing the service needs of children and their parents, in involving parents and children in the case planning process, and/or in establishing sufficiently frequent face-to-face contact between caseworkers and the children and parents in their caseloads. However, the case reviews also revealed that DSS was more effective with regard to achieving these indicators in the foster care cases than in the in-home services cases.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Well-Being Outcome 1 are presented and discussed below.

Item 17. Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 17 was applicable for all 50 cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had (1) adequately assessed the needs of children, parents, and foster parents; and (2) provided the services necessary to meet those needs. The results were the following:

- Item 17 was rated as a Strength in 23 (46%) of the 50 applicable cases (18 of which were foster care cases);
- Item 17 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 27 (54%) of the 50 applicable cases (12 of which were foster care cases).

Cases in Marion County were more likely to be rated as a Strength (83%) for this item than were cases in Greenville County (33%) or Lexington County (36%). In addition, foster care cases were considerably more likely to be rated as a Strength for this item than were in-home services cases (60% of foster care cases were rated as a Strength compared to 25% of in-home services cases).

This item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the needs of children, parents, and foster parents had been adequately assessed and that identified service needs had been met.

A rating of Area Needing Improvement was assigned to 12 foster care cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Failure to assess services needs and provide services to foster parents (5 cases);
- Incomplete assessment or no assessment of the needs of the children so that many needs were not addressed (3 cases);
- Incomplete assessment or no assessment of the needs of parents so that many needs were not addressed (5 cases);
- Extensive delay in service provision (1 case).

A rating of Area Needing Improvement was assigned to 15 in-home services cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Mother's needs were not assessed either initially or on an ongoing basis (8 cases);
- Father's needs were not assessed either initially or on an ongoing basis (8 cases);
- Children's needs were not assessed either initially or on an ongoing basis (6 cases);
- Services were not provided to meet identified needs (4 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this item were in general agreement that DSS is not consistent in assessing the needs of children and parents or providing adequate services to meet identified needs. Some stakeholders noted that in-depth quality work with families is not possible because caseworkers are "stretched too thin." Other stakeholders said that caseworkers do not spend enough time with children to be able to thoroughly assess their needs. A few stakeholders reported that caseworkers are not sufficiently knowledgeable in the areas of mental health or education to be aware of when they should refer children and families for these services. Finally, a few stakeholders expressed concern about the lack of coordination of services among providers.

Stakeholders also reported that the needs of foster parents, including relative caregivers, are not adequately assessed and addressed. Stakeholders noted that foster parents often are not informed about available services for children and that foster parents often have to seek services and assessments on their own.

Determination and Discussion: Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 54 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the State had not adequately assessed and/or addressed the service needs of children and parents. A key concern identified for both foster care and in-home services cases pertained to a lack of assessment or an inadequate assessment of the family with respect to service needs. In many of the in-home cases, the agency addressed the immediate problem, but did not conduct a more comprehensive assessment of the family to identify underlying problems that may contribute to the risk of harm to the child.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the usual casework procedure is to conduct a needs assessment prior to the completion of a written case plan and to evaluate a family's progress on a quarterly basis in a planning conference. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the agency is in the process of implementing a new assessment tool and reports that stakeholders interviewed as part of the State's self-assessment process indicated a need for the following:

- Better assessments at entry into care;
- More specific treatment plans;
- Routine comprehensive assessments on children.

Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 18 was applicable for 49 of the 50 cases. One case was excluded from assessment because during the period under review the whereabouts of the parents were not known although the agency attempted to locate them. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether parents (including pre-adoptive parents or permanent caregivers) and children (if age-appropriate) had been involved in the case planning process, and if not, whether their involvement was contrary to the child's best interest. A determination of involvement in case planning required that a parent or child had actively participated in identifying the services and goals included in the case plan. This assessment produced the following findings:

- Item 18 was rated as a Strength in 23 (47%) of the 49 applicable cases (20 of which were foster care cases);
- Item 18 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 26 (53%) of the 49 applicable cases (9 of which were foster care cases).

There were no noteworthy differences among counties with respect to the percentage of cases rated as a Strength for this item. However, the ratings differed considerably as a function of the type of case. Only 15 percent of the in-home services cases were rated as a Strength for this item compared to 69 percent of the foster care cases.

Item 18 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that all appropriate parties had actively participated in the case planning process. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Fathers who should have been involved in case planning were not involved (16 cases);
- Mothers who should have been involved in case planning were not involved (17 cases);
- Children who were old enough to have been involved in case planning were not involved (11 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this item were in general agreement that although DSS policy encourages involvement of parents and youth in case planning, this does not occur on a consistent basis. Stakeholders noted that case plans usually are developed by the caseworkers (sometimes in conjunction with agency attorneys) and then presented to the family for signature.

Determination and Discussion: Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 53 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DSS had not made diligent efforts to involve parents and/or children in the case planning process.

According to the Statewide Assessment, a review of case records indicated a need for more active involvement of parents in the development of case plans, as treatment plans are often presented to parents for signature with copies provided (the treatment plan is part of the overall case plan). However, interviews with parents during Quality Review indicated that when parents are involved in case planning, their input and opinions are respected. The Statewide Assessment also notes that DSS is required to notify parents and age-appropriate children of Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) meetings so they can participate in the evaluation and planning that occurs during these sessions. Transportation is provided when needed.

Item 19. Caseworker visits with child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Item 19 was assessed for 49 of the 50 cases. One case was excluded from assessment because the child was on “runaway status” during the period under review. In conducting this assessment, reviewers were to determine whether the frequency of visits between the caseworker and the children was sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child's safety and well-being and whether visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 19 was rated as a Strength in 35 (71%) of the 49 applicable cases (26 of which were foster care cases);
- Item 19 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 14 (29%) of the 49 applicable cases (3 of which were foster care cases).

Variations in ratings for this item occurred both across counties and as a function of the type of case. Again, cases in Marion County were more likely to be rated as a Strength for this item (92%) than were cases in Greenville County (69%) or Lexington County (57%). In addition, 90 percent of the foster care cases were rated as a Strength for this item compared to only 35 percent of the in-home services cases.

Reviewers noted the following with respect to frequency of visits for the 29 applicable foster care cases:

- In 2 cases, visits typically occurred once a week;
- In 5 cases, visits typically occurred twice a month;
- In 18 cases, visits typically occurred once a month;
- In 4 cases, visits typically occurred less frequently than once a month.

Reviewers noted the following with respect to frequency of visits for the 20 in-home services cases:

- In 1 case, visits occurred once a week;
- In 2 cases, visits typically occurred twice a month;
- In 8 cases, visits typically occurred once a month;
- In 9 cases, visits typically occurred less frequently than once a month.

Item 19 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and children was sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child's safety and well-being and promote attainment of case goals.

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The frequency of caseworker visits was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, although when visits occurred they did focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (9 cases);
- The frequency of caseworker visits was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, and the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (3 cases);
- The frequency of caseworker visits was sufficient, but the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (2 cases).

Stakeholder interview results differed slightly than the case review results regarding worker visits with children. Stakeholders in Lexington and Marion Counties noted that caseworkers generally visit with children about once a month. The case review results indicate that this item was rated as a Strength in 92 percent of the cases in Marion county compared to 57 percent of the cases in Lexington county. Stakeholders in Greenville County expressed the opinion that caseworkers rarely have face-to-face contact with the children in their caseloads and rarely visit the foster homes. The case review results were that the item was rated as a Strength in 69 percent of the cases in Greenville County. Stakeholders also noted that children who are placed with relatives are rarely visited by their caseworkers.

Determination and Discussion: Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 29 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children were not of sufficient frequency and/or quality. A key concern identified was that visits with children in the in-home services cases were not of sufficient frequency to meet the child’s needs or monitor safety; in 45 percent of these cases, face-to-face contact between caseworkers and the children occurred less frequently than once a month.

This finding is not consistent with information in the Statewide Assessment concerning policy regarding caseworker contact with children. According to the Statewide Assessment, DSS policy requires that within 3 working days of placement, the first visit with the child is to be arranged, followed by monthly face-to-face contact. The Statewide Assessment notes that monthly contact between the children and the caseworker also is expected for in-home services cases. In addition, CAPSS issues an exception report when a caseworker is unable to visit a child and/or foster care family within one month.

Item 20. Caseworker visits with parents

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 20 was applicable for 48 of the 50 cases. There were two foster care cases that were not applicable for this assessment because TPR had been attained for the parents prior to the period under review, and parents were no longer involved in the lives of the children, and there were no adoptive parents. Reviewers were to assess whether the caseworker’s face-to-face contact with the children’s mothers and fathers was of sufficient frequency and quality to promote attainment of case goals and/or ensure the children's safety and well being. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 20 was rated as a Strength in 22 (46%) of the 48 cases (16 of which were foster care cases);
- Item 20 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 26 (54%) of the 48 cases (12 of which were foster care cases).

Although performance on this item was fairly low in all counties, 73 percent of the cases reviewed in Marion County were rated as a Strength for this item, compared to 46 percent of the cases in Lexington County and 33 percent of the cases in Greenville County. Also, 57 percent of the foster care cases were rated as a Strength for this item compared to 30 percent of the in-home services cases.

Typical patterns of caseworker visits with mothers were the following (44 applicable cases):

- Weekly visits - 2 cases (1 of which was a foster care case);
- Twice a month visits - 8 cases (6 of which were foster care cases);
- Monthly visits – 19 cases (12 of which were foster care cases);
- Less than monthly visits – 14 cases (5 of which were foster care cases);
- No visits – 1 case (which was not a foster care case).

Typical patterns of caseworker visits with fathers were the following (32 applicable cases):

- Twice a month visits - 2 cases (both of which were foster care cases);
- Monthly visits – 8 cases (all 8 of which were foster care cases);
- Less than monthly visits - 18 cases (5 of which were foster care cases);
- No visits – 4 cases (1 of which was a foster care case).

This item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that caseworker visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of parents and children and that visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment.

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- Caseworker visits were not occurring with sufficient frequency, although when the visits occurred, they focused on substantive issues pertaining to the case (13 cases);
- Caseworker visits were not of sufficient frequency and did not focus on substantive issues pertaining to the case (9 cases);
- Caseworker visits were of sufficient frequency but did not focus on substantive issues pertaining to the case (4 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this item noted that the agency is more likely to visit with mothers than with fathers, particularly non-custodial fathers.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 54 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and/or quality of caseworker visits with parents were not sufficient to monitor the safety and well-being of the child or promote attainment of case goals.

According to the Statewide Assessment, monthly face-to-face contact between caseworkers and parents is required, as well as quarterly contact at planning conferences. Contact with incarcerated or institutionalized parents is required whenever possible. In addition, monthly face-to-face contact is required with the parent of a child who has returned home when the child remains in agency custody or supervision.

Well-Being Outcome 2

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Greenville	Lexington	Marion	Total	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	15	7	10	32	84.2
Partially Achieved:	0	0	0	0	0
Not Achieved or Addressed:	4	1	1	6	15.8
Not Applicable:					

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 2

South Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2 based on the finding that 84.2 percent of the cases reviewed were determined to have substantially achieved this outcome, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

The CFSR case reviews found that in most of the applicable cases, DSS was effective in assessing children's educational needs and providing appropriate services to meet those needs. However, in 16 percent of these cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to ensure that educational needs were assessed and appropriate services provided.

The findings for the item assessed for Well Being Outcome 2 are presented below.

Item 21. Educational needs of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 21 was applicable for 38 of the 50 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable for assessment included those in which the children were not of school age or in-home services cases in which educational needs were not an issue. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether children's educational needs were appropriately assessed and whether services were provided to meet those needs. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 21 was rated as a Strength in 32 (84%) of the 38 applicable cases (20 of which were foster care cases);
- Item 21 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 6 (16%) of the 38 applicable cases (4 of which were foster care cases).

Cases were rated as a Strength for this item when reviewers determined that all potential educational needs were assessed and addressed as appropriate. Cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that services were not provided to address educational needs or that educational needs had not been adequately assessed.

Stakeholders commenting on this item had differing opinions. While some stakeholders reported that DSS makes concerted efforts to address children's educational needs, other stakeholders indicated that caseworkers do not usually attend to children's educational needs, often because they do not have the time. Some stakeholders noted that foster parents often arrange and pay for services such as tutors and extra school-related activities because the agency does not have the money.

Stakeholders also noted that in some areas of the State, the local Departments of Education do not want foster children in their schools because they are perceived as "behavior problems." As a result, DSS has to go to court to get the children into school. State-level stakeholders reported that DSS is working on a Memorandum of Understanding with the State Department of Education to address local-level issues.

Determination and Discussion: Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 16 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DSS had not made diligent efforts to meet the educational needs of children.

According to the Statewide Assessment, every child must be assessed for educational needs, and these needs are to be assessed on a monthly basis during caseworker contacts with foster children and foster parents. The Statewide Assessment also noted the following with respect to DSS policy regarding educational issues:

- Legislation encourages that children should remain in the same school after placement in foster care;
- The priority for grants and scholarship proviso gives foster children priority in receiving post-secondary education assistance;
- DSS has developed a variety of partnerships to assist in achieving educational objectives;
- DSS employs an education specialist to analyze educational data and develop a comprehensive statewide strategic plan.

The Statewide Assessment reports that stakeholders interviewed as part of the State’s self-assessment process provided the following recommendations to improve educational performance for foster children:

- Conduct comprehensive educational assessments;
- Get foster parents more involved with teachers;
- Provide foster children with mentors.

Well-Being Outcome 3

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Greenville	Lexington	Marion	Total	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	15	9	9	33	68.8
Partially Achieved:	4	1	3	8	16.7
Not Achieved or Addressed:	5	2	0	7	14.5
Not Applicable:	0	2	0		

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 3

South Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 68.8 percent of the 48 applicable cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.

The CFPSR case reviews found that DSS was not consistent in its efforts to address children's needs with respect to both physical and mental health. A key concern identified was that children were not receiving needed medical, dental, and mental health services.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Well-Being Outcome 3 are presented and discussed below.

Item 22. Physical health of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 22 was applicable for 42 of the 50 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable for this assessment were in-home services cases in which physical health concerns were not an issue. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether (1) children's physical health needs had been appropriately assessed, and (2) the services designed to meet those needs had been, or were being, provided. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 22 was rated as a Strength in 33 (79%) of the 42 applicable cases (23 of which were foster care cases);
- Item 22 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 9 (21%) of the 42 applicable cases (7 of which were foster care cases).

Cases were rated as a Strength for this item when reviewers determined that children's health needs were routinely assessed and services provided as needed. Cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item when reviewers determined the following:

- Health related issues were not sufficiently assessed despite evidence that children may have health-related service needs (i.e., a physical exam was not provided although physical abuse was substantiated (1 in-home services case);
- Children had health needs that were not met (3 foster care cases and 1 in-home services case);
- Children did not have health screening at entry into foster care (2 foster care cases);
- Dental needs were not addressed (2 foster care cases).

In 20 of the 30 foster care cases reviewed, foster parents received medical information at the time of placement.

Marion and Lexington County stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that the physical health needs of children in foster care are being met, although they noted that there is a scarcity of providers, particularly dentists, who will accept Medicaid. Stakeholders in Greenville County, however, suggested that medical exams are not a priority for caseworkers. They agreed that

dentists who will accept Medicaid are difficult to find. State-level stakeholders reported that DSS is working with the Foster Parent Association to set up medical passports for all children in foster care.

One stakeholder noted that there is no Medicaid coverage for orthodontics, and sometimes a fund raiser will be held in order to pay for a child's braces.

Determination and Discussion: Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 21 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not adequately addressed the physical health needs of children in foster care and in-home services cases.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DSS policy requires that arrangements must be made for every foster child to receive an initial Comprehensive Medical Assessment within 5 working days after entry into care. Follow up services identified in the assessment must be provided; continued assessment of medical needs is done during monthly contacts with children and foster parents. The Statewide Assessment also notes that a Medical Visa is provided to a child's foster parents, with information on who will assume primary responsibility for updating the information, and Medicaid is available for youth in care until age 21. The Statewide Assessment also indicates that the physical health needs of children receiving in-home services are addressed in the assessment process and treatment planning. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, stakeholders interviewed as part of the State's self-assessment process indicated a need for increasing accessibility of medical and dental health providers, especially in rural areas.

Item 23. Mental health of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 23 was applicable for 38 of the 50 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable were foster care cases in which the child was too young for an assessment of mental health needs or in-home cases in which children's mental health needs were not the reason for agency contact with the child. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether (1) mental health needs had been appropriately assessed and (2) appropriate services to address those needs had been offered or provided. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 23 was rated as a Strength in 29 (76%) of the 38 applicable cases (17 of which were foster care cases);
- Item 23 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 9 (24%) of the 38 applicable cases (5 of which were foster care cases).

Cases were rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that mental health needs had been “significantly” assessed and “significantly” addressed (if relevant) (28 cases), or that mental health needs had been “partially” assessed but “significantly” addressed (1 case). The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- Mental health needs were “significantly” assessed but “partially” or “not at all” addressed (1 foster care and 1 in-home case);
- Mental health needs were “partially” assessed and “partially” or “not at all” addressed (3 foster care cases and 1 in-home case);
- Mental health needs were “not at all” assessed (1 foster care case and 2 in-home cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that accessing mental health services is a problem in some areas. Stakeholders noted that in 12 counties there are Department of Mental Health therapists located in the DSS offices to conduct mental health assessments of children coming into foster care. In these counties, there is good access to mental health services. However, in counties in which there is not a mental health person in the DSS office, the community health services agency is not always responsive to agency needs in a timely manner because of their caseloads. However, stakeholders noted that mental health services are available through all community mental health centers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Stakeholders also reported that although getting the local mental health agency and local DSS to work together can be a challenge, the relationship between these agencies at the State level is a good one.

Determination and Discussion: Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 24 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DSS had not made concerted efforts to address the mental health needs of children. A key concern identified was that mental health assessments were not being conducted or were not sufficiently comprehensive to capture potential problems.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DSS policy requires an initial mental health assessment within 24-48 hours of entry into foster care, and the development of a treatment plan addressing any identified needs; continuing assessment of mental health needs is done during monthly contacts with children and foster parents. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the mental health needs of children receiving in-home services are addressed in the assessment process and treatment planning.

Information in the Statewide Assessment indicates that mental health services are provided through family preservation services and co-location of a Mental Health caseworker in the local DSS office. Stakeholders interviewed as part of the State’s self-assessment process recommended the following improvements regarding meeting children’s mental health needs:

- Routine comprehensive needs assessments;
- Placement of children in their own community;

- Improved local relationships between DSS and Mental Health;
- Appropriate access to services for in-home cases;
- Increased foster parent advocacy for services for children.

SECTION 2: SYSTEMIC FACTORS

IV. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4
Rating	1	2	3X	4

South Carolina achieved substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. Findings for the item assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 24. State is operating a Statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 24 is rated as a Strength because information on the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child in foster care is readily retrievable from the State's data system.

According to the Statewide Assessment, South Carolina's child welfare information system, called CAPSS, is the latest version of the State's Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). Implemented in October 2001, CAPSS provides case tracking for Child Protective Services (CPS), Adult Protective Services (APS), Foster Care, Foster Care Licensing, and Adoptions. In addition, CAPSS manages support services authorization, Targeted Case Management, Foster Care Board payments, and adoptions subsidy payments. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, CAPSS is able to identify the status, demographic characteristics, placements, and goals for every child and family in which there are human services concerns. Ongoing CAPSS development is in progress to complete the rest of the federal requirements for a SACWIS by June of 2004.

Information in the Statewide Assessment suggests that CAPSS is more user friendly than the prior version of the SACWIS, but users have indicated the need for formalized follow-up training on this version. Users have also indicated the need for additional edits to assist in entry of mandatory elements.

Stakeholders commenting on CAPSS during the onsite CFSR were in general agreement that CAPSS has the capability to identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child in foster care. Some stakeholders noted that cases are viewable across units and counties. Stakeholders also reported that the system allows access to prior case history.

Several stakeholders also noted however that the system is cumbersome, difficult to navigate, and that forms used in the system vary by county. Concerns also were expressed by stakeholders regarding the quality of training on CAPSS.

V. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
		1	2X	3

South Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with the systemic factor of case review system. Findings for the items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 25. Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child’s parent(s) that includes the required provisions.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 25 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because there is a lack of consistency in actively involving parents and children in the case planning process.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DSS policy requires that a planning conference be convened within 25 calendar days after a child has been placed and that a Placement/Treatment Plan be completed prior to the first scheduled Removal Hearing, which usually occurs within 35 days of placement. Policy also requires that (1) the protective service caseworker and supervisor, foster care

caseworker and supervisor, GAL, parents, and age appropriate children participate in the planning conference and establish the preliminary plan; (2) the child’s plan be updated every 6 months; and (3) the family’s progress be evaluated quarterly. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, although policy and State statute require parental involvement in the development of case plans, “record reviews indicated that more active involvement is needed.”

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR reported that although the agency stresses family involvement in case planning, most plans are developed by the caseworkers without parental involvement and then presented to the parents for signature. This perception is consistent with the finding of the onsite case review process. Case reviewers determined that parents were involved in case planning in only 47 percent of the cases reviewed. Several stakeholders noted that although DSS has developed a “family meeting” or a “family planning conference” approach to developing the case plan, these meetings are not having a major impact on family involvement in case planning for the following reasons: (1) they do not always take place, (2) no specific person is assigned the task of facilitating the meetings, and (3) there are no obligations for future family meetings to update the case plan. A few stakeholders also reported that DSS does not routinely conduct a diligent search for absent fathers to involve them in the case planning process, although this is required in policy.

Item 26. Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 26 is rated as a Strength because information gathered during the CFSR process indicates that each child in foster care receives a periodic review at least every 6 months.

According to the Statewide Assessment, a Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) was established to conduct case reviews of children in foster care at least every 6 months. Statewide data from the FCRB indicate that in 2001, 96 percent of the children in care for 4 months (as reported to the board monthly by supervisors) had timely reviews. In addition, the Statewide Assessment notes that DSS is establishing joint quarterly meetings with FCRB and Guardians Ad Litem (GAL) to develop strategies to address barriers to permanency.

Stakeholders participating in the onsite CFSR reported that the 6-month reviews are being held in a timely manner throughout the State and that they are well-attended. Stakeholders indicated that caseworkers are responsible for notifying relevant parties of the FCRB reviews and for tracking when a case needs to be reviewed. Stakeholders noted that there are no “ticklers” on CAPSS to alert caseworkers to the need for a 6-month or permanency review for individual children.

Marion County and Lexington County stakeholders reported that judicial reviews also take place at least every 6 months and often more frequently. Although court reviews do not replace FCRB reviews, the court can order a review, or the agency can ask for a court review in addition to the FCRB review. Stakeholders had differing opinions on the value of the FCRB. While some stakeholders expressed the view that the FCRB reviews help in moving children to permanency, other stakeholders suggested that FCRB recommendations often do not match the goals for the child and that the agency is not required to respond to FCRB recommendations.

Item 27. Provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.

_____ Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 27 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because permanency hearings are not consistently held in a timely manner.

According to the Statewide Assessment, State law provides for an annual permanency hearing by the Family Court no later than one year after the child is placed in foster care. Annual reviews are required thereafter except for special cases. The Statewide Assessment notes that as of September 2002, a review of cases indicated that 84 percent of cases had timely permanency hearings. Quality Reviews suggested that the percentage may actually be higher and that documentation problems and delays in updating the computer system may be interfering with accurate data collection regarding hearings.

Stakeholders participating in the onsite CFSSR expressed differing opinions regarding whether the 12-month permanency hearings are being held in a timely manner. They noted that tracking cases and requesting permanency hearings is the responsibility of the county DSS. The court does not take responsibility for tracking permanency hearing requirements and the court does not automatically schedule children for future hearings at the time of a hearing or review. Although some stakeholders reported that the hearings are taking place on time and that they are effective in promoting permanency, many other stakeholders reported that permanency hearings are not being consistently held in a timely manner and that this is a significant barrier to achieving permanency. Stakeholders reported that delays in permanency hearings are occurring for the following reasons:

- The court has granted a continuance;
- There are scheduling problems due to overcrowded court dockets;
- The number of agency attorneys is not sufficient;
- The courts do not have a system to track overdue permanency hearings;

- The county attorney must request the hearing, rather than the hearing being automatically scheduled by the court.

Item 28. Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 28 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the State is not consistently proceeding with the termination of parental rights in a timely manner.

According to the Statewide Assessment, a TPR hearing is considered a permanency planning hearing with annual hearings required one year from the TPR hearing. Once they have a TPR hearing, that date sets the annual schedule for subsequent hearings.

Most stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that there is no clear process in the State for TPR proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA). One problem noted by stakeholders is that DSS is not routinely filing for TPR at the point at which the child has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. In addition, DSS is not providing reasons in the case file for the decision not to seek TPR. Stakeholders reported that the lack of filing may be attributed to caseworker turnover, a shortage of agency attorneys (who are the ones who actually request the hearing), a lack of attention by attorneys to the issue of TPR, and a lack of a diligent search for absent parents. In one county, a stakeholder indicated that the agency prefers to wait until an adoptive home has been found to file for TPR, because the agency can continue collecting child support from the parents up to the point of TPR.

Another problem identified by stakeholders is that once TPR is filed, it may be several months before a hearing is held. This was attributed to overcrowded dockets and the difficulty of scheduling TPR hearings when the court does not accord priority to these hearings. Stakeholders in Greenville County reported that the courts have implemented a “sweeps week” to clear out the backlog of TPR hearings. Stakeholders also noted that delays in TPR proceedings can be attributed to the fact that the courts tend to be “reunification-oriented” and often will grant continuances for TPR hearings and ask for a delay if parent shows any progress at all.

Item 29. Provides a process for foster parents, preadoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 29 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the State does not consistently notify foster parent, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of court hearings and FCRB reviews, nor are they consistently provided an opportunity to be heard in accordance with the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

According to the Statewide Assessment, South Carolina law requires that notice of all hearings be given to foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care. State law provides that foster parents or any party in interest may move to intervene in a case and if the motion is granted, may move for review. South Carolina law also requires the FCRB to inform foster parents of their right to petition the family court for termination of parental rights and adoption and to encourage foster parents to initiate these proceedings in appropriate cases.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, a survey conducted through the State Foster Parent Association indicates that foster parents are receiving notification of the FCRB reviews and that the majority of those surveyed participated in FCRB reviews. Foster parents who cannot attend FCRB meetings are encouraged to submit written reports.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that documentation that notice of a court hearing has been sent to foster parents is maintained in the legal file and is not captured in the agency's data reports. In a survey conducted by the FCRB in 2001, 36 percent of the foster parents responding indicated that they rarely or never receive notice of court hearings.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the CFSR expressed differing opinions regarding the notification of caregivers about reviews and hearings and their ability to participate in those reviews and hearings. DSS workers appear to be responsible for notification of foster parents regarding FCRB reviews, while the DSS attorney is responsible for notifying foster parents and other caregivers regarding court hearings. Lexington County stakeholders reported that foster parents are not notified of court hearings or FCRB hearings, and if they find out about them, they are encouraged not to attend. Stakeholders in that county noted that foster parents rarely attend court hearings although at least one judge will give them the opportunity to speak if they attend. Marion County stakeholders expressed differing perceptions about whether foster parents were notified and what their role was in the hearings and reviews. Some stakeholders noted that the FCRB is provided with copies of the letters notifying foster parents about the review. However, other stakeholders reported that the DSS attorneys are not aware that there is a process for inviting foster parents to court hearings. Stakeholders in Greenville County expressed the opinion that policy requires the DSS attorney to notify foster parents of court hearings, but this does not happen on a routine basis. Stakeholders in this county noted that caseworkers will notify foster parents of FCRB reviews, but are not likely to encourage them to attend.

In contrast to county-level stakeholders, State level stakeholders said that foster parents receive notification of court hearings, but the opportunity to be heard in court hearings varies by court and judge.

VI. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4

South Carolina is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of quality assurance system. Findings for the items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 30. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 30 is rated as a Strength because the State has developed and implemented standards to ensure the protection of the health and safety of children in foster care.

According to the Statewide Assessment, State statutes and policy standards, as well as internal and external monitoring systems, ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services. South Carolina established standards in agency policy and State Regulations (revised March 2003) for foster family care and regulations for residential group care.

Stakeholders commenting on the issue of standards during the onsite CFSR indicated that the State has established standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services, although a few stakeholders noted that additional training may be needed to fully implement the practice standards. Most stakeholders cited the requirement that children entering foster care must have a medical and mental health screening within one week of entry into foster care as an exemplary State standard. Marion County stakeholders also cited as an exemplary standard the requirement that children in foster care be visited at least once a month.

Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 31 is rated as a Strength because the State maintains a quality assurance system that evaluates and measures program strengths and areas needing improvement.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the current DSS Quality Assurance (QA) review system was implemented in November 2001. The QA review process monitors, evaluates, and provides feedback to DSS on the performance of the overall system of care and whether services provided are of sufficient intensity, scope, and quality to meet the individual needs of children and their families. Through case reviews, system data review, staff interviews, and client and provider surveys, the QA reviewer documents the actual service delivery activity of a county as well as formulates an assessment of the county's use of DSS procedures in resolving issues affecting client services. QA reviews identify areas that need improvement, and confirm strengths and successful strategies in service provision. The QA sample includes all types of service cases. The county under review conducts a self-assessment, provides comments as a part of the review report, and works with the Office of Regional and County Operations (ORCO) to examine and develop an action plan based on findings.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, QA reports on findings are sent to the Governor and County Legislative Delegation members and are posted on the DSS web site. They also are provided to all Assistant Directors in the Office of Program Policy Oversight, so training on identified needs can be developed and implemented. Finally, additional local level monitoring is performed through supervisory reviews and sign off on treatment plans and case evaluations.

During the onsite CFSR, State-level stakeholders reported that the current QA process focuses on key decisions and on the quality of practice. Although the State has a QA process in place, the counties are only reviewed every 5 years (it used to be every 2 years). Once the review is completed, the report is published on the website, and the county must develop an improvement plan. Counties can request training and TA to assist them in making improvements.

However, interviews conducted at the local level indicate that County-level stakeholders, including DSS staff, were not aware of the State's QA process. Lack of knowledge of the State's QA process also may be due to the fact that the counties selected for the CFSR had not yet been reviewed by the State under the new Qualitative Review Process at the time of the onsite review.

VII. TRAINING

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4

South Carolina is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of training. Findings for the items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 32. The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 32 is rated as a “Strength” because the State provides a pre-service training program, and requires staff to pass a certification test with a minimum score of 75 percent.

According to the Statewide Assessment, all Child Protection, Foster Care, Adoption, Managed Treatment Services, and Foster Care Licensing caseworkers must be certified through the Child Welfare Certification Training. Following orientation in the county, and before taking on case management responsibilities, new caseworkers receive three consecutive weeks of basic training through the *Child Welfare Training Academy*.

Stakeholders commenting on the issue of basic training during the onsite review noted that there is a 3-week basic training course and then after that, caseworkers receive training at the Academy 1-2 days a month for the next 8 to 9 months. State-level stakeholders noted that new caseworkers are in the county office for 2 to 3 weeks prior to basic training to “observe,” which may incorporate a variety of activities, including shadowing. Stakeholders noted that after completion of training, the new caseworkers are tested and must receive a score of 75 percent to be certified.

Although several stakeholders expressed the opinion that the basic training offered was adequate, other stakeholders suggested that the training focuses too much on forms rather than on practice. They suggested that more on-the-job training is needed, as well as training

in assessing family dynamics. There was general agreement among stakeholders that caseworkers do not receive a caseload until the 3-week basic training is done, but that often supervisors will pull them out of the follow-up training to attend to more immediate caseload needs. Stakeholders noted that adoption is not covered in the basic training and that there is no mentoring program after training is completed.

Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.

_____ Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 33 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because there is no longer a requirement that caseworkers must complete a specified number of training hours each year to address the professional development issues necessary to carry out their duties. Although the State provides a calendar of ongoing training, it is now optional, and stakeholders expressed that the training does not meet the needs of front-line staff.

According to the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers may receive between 16-30 additional days of intermediate and advanced training during the 12 months following initial training. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that due to high caseloads and staff turnover, there is no current requirement that caseworkers complete a specific number of training hours annually. Instead, supervisors are responsible for determining the caseworker's ongoing training needs, in conjunction with the caseworker. The Statewide Assessment also notes that a comprehensive Staff Development and Training Catalog and Procedures Guide is distributed annually to DSS offices, and supervisors are responsible for assisting caseworker integration of classroom training with on-the-job performance. Supervisors are required to complete supervisory and management classes in addition to being certified caseworkers.

The Statewide Assessment notes that there was a Master of Social Work and Bachelor of Social Work Degree program that DSS participated in, but that these programs were ending June 30, 2003, due to budget constraints.

Stakeholders commenting on the issue of ongoing training during the onsite review generally described the training during the first year as the "ongoing training." Stakeholders in Lexington County expressed the opinion that the ongoing training does not meet the needs of the caseworkers and that training for supervisors tends to focus more on leadership skills than on child welfare practice. Greenville County stakeholders reported that staff have a mandatory training for 20 hours per year on specified topics including adoption training. There is occasional mandatory training based on identification of needs, but this does not equate to any required

number of training hours per year. Also, although a license is not required to work with the agency, adoption workers must be certified to conduct home studies.

Item 34. The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

This item was rated as a Strength because training is provided for current and prospective foster and adoptive parents and staff of child care facilities that generally addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to support their parenting.

According to the Statewide Assessment, as of March 2003, the State requires that foster parents participate in a 14 hour pre-service training and 14 hours of ongoing training every year. Training is incorporated into a Resource Family Training Institute. The Statewide Assessment also notes that although foster and adoptive parents have been trained separately in the past, the new licensing training is designed to recruit families who are qualified as both.

Most ongoing training will continue to be conducted by the USC Center for Child and Family Studies in all-day sessions on Saturdays throughout the State. Foster parent re-licensing training is conducted on Saturdays at SCSU, to be offered monthly beginning July 2003. Training needs are determined by needs assessments done by care providers and caseworkers, as well as other surveys and studies.

State-level stakeholders commenting on the area of foster and adoptive parent training during the onsite CFSR noted that there is a new law requiring 14 hours of pre-service training for foster parents. They reported that the foster parent training is conducted by private contractors at the county level and that the training emphasizes the foster parents' relationship with biological parent. State-level stakeholders also indicated that the Tribe and the State are working together to develop a cultural competency training for foster parents.

Information from county-level stakeholders varies across counties. Marion County stakeholders indicated that 20 hours of ongoing training are required for foster parents in that county. They noted that there is training on such topics as adolescent development, infant development, conflict resolution, and pre-natal exposure to alcohol or other drugs. Stakeholders in this county indicated that the training is well-received by the foster parents and is perceived as helpful in preparing them to work with children in their homes.

In contrast, Lexington County stakeholders reported that the foster parent association provides training to foster parents in that county, but that the training is not adequate to meet their needs, particularly with regard to therapeutic foster homes. Stakeholders noted that foster parents need more training on how to deal with children with behavioral issues and how to recognize signs of abuse.

Greenville County stakeholders reported that, in addition to the preservice training, there is an annual requirement of 14 hours of ongoing training and that both foster parents are required to participate. The training is offered by a private contractor. However, stakeholders in this county noted that there is not a standard curriculum used for all foster parents, although the curriculum selected by the county must meet State agency established standards and cover topics as required by the State agency.

VIII. SERVICE ARRAY

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2X	3	4

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of service array. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 35. The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 35 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because, although the State has a broad array of services that assess and address the strengths and needs of children and families, the Statewide Assessment and the onsite review indicate that there are significant gaps in services.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DSS provides a wide array of contracted services ranging from child abuse prevention to adoption, and provides these services in a variety of environments ranging from in-home to residential facilities. The contracted services include: placement prevention services, parent education, parent aide, child care, intensive family services, therapeutic child treatment, clinical day programming, therapeutic foster care, moderate and high management rehabilitative services, specialized treatment for sexual offenders, supervised independent living, intensive crisis care, and WRAP services. Services also are provided to DSS clients by other agencies through referrals for services. These referred services include mental health, family preservation, substance abuse, and health screenings. Seven licensed child-placing agencies provide adoption services, and IV-B funds provide post-adoption and respite services.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, the needs and gaps in services include foster parent respite and substance abuse treatment. There also is a need for additional foster homes for adolescents and treatment options, and for expanding the Independent Living services options to all counties.

Stakeholders commenting on the issue of service array during the onsite review identified both positive services and service gaps. The identified positive services included the following:

- The County Commission on alcohol and drugs provides substance abuse counseling and referrals services (Marion County);
- Volunteer drivers program to assist with transportation;
- Family preservation services;
- Domestic violence programs;
- Anger management programs;
- Inpatient and outpatient substance abuse treatment;
- Physical therapy and speech therapy available through Medicaid;
- Independent Living Services;
- Managed Treatment Services.

Several stakeholders noted that there is lack of services due to budget cuts. Service gaps included the following:

- Foster homes;
- Quality mental health services;
- Parenting classes;
- Medical providers who will accept Medicaid;
- Services for adolescent mothers;

- Substance abuse treatment services;
- Intensive family preservation services;
- Domestic violence shelters;
- Managed Treatment Services.

Item 36. The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State’s CFSP.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 36 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because of concerns regarding service accessibility in some areas of the State. Because the State’s service array is not readily available in all counties, families experience difficulty in accessing needed services.

According to the Statewide Assessment not all services in item 35 are accessible or available to families and children in all South Carolina counties. Where service programs are not available, it usually is due to a lack of providers or of funding.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSP noted that there are a variety of services that are not available in rural areas of the State. These include mental health services, dental services, and inpatient substance abuse services.

Item 37. The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 37 is rated as a Strength because services can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families. The use of flexible funding is an effective way to craft an array of services tailored to meet the needs of individual families and children.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the DSS service approach is an individualized, community-based service approach designed to meet the needs of children and families. These needs are identified with the family through the family assessment process. Flexible funding helps to meet unique needs of individual families and foster and adoptive children through a broad array of intervention and treatment services including: in-home family interventions; counseling; homemaker; emergency day care; youth enrichment; transportation; psychological services; and meeting basic tangible needs such as emergency rent, utilities, and emergency home repair payments.

Several stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DSS agencies have access to flexible funds and to programs that permit the individualization of services to meet the unique needs of children and families, although this varied across counties. Marion County stakeholders noted that in that county the use of flexible funds for things such as paying a family’s rent or utility bill has helped keep families together. Greenville County stakeholders cited the MTS program as promoting individualized services for children and families. State-level stakeholders were somewhat mixed in their perceptions of the capacity to individualize services. Finally, Lexington county stakeholders were generally not as positive about the capacity of DSS to individualize services. They noted that flexible funds are used for families when they are available, but that these funds are limited.

IX. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4

South Carolina achieved substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 38. In implementing the provisions of the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), the State engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 38 is rated as a Strength because there is broad collaboration with other agencies in the development of the goals and objectives for the State’s Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP).

According to the Statewide Assessment, collaboration with other agencies occurs on State and local levels with community agencies and citizen groups. The input of these stakeholders is considered in agency planning and operations, including the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP). The Statewide Assessment also notes that DSS collaborates with the Catawba Indian Nation to develop

cultural programs, foster home recruitment, and other services. The Tribe raised issues around the identification of Native American children, resulting in changes to the CPS intake document.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR were in general agreement that DSS planning incorporates input from many representatives in the community. State-level stakeholders reported that DSS has a stakeholders' advisory group that is involved in discussions of the CFSP, the Program Improvement Plan, and the Agency plan. The group includes youth, foster parents, Tribal representatives, representatives of the Foster Care Review Board, and representatives of the Office of Alcohol and Drug Treatment. Stakeholders noted that at the State level, DSS is very open to input and opinions from people outside of the system as well as from people within the system, including caseworkers, law enforcement, and foster parents. County-level stakeholders indicated that a similar process of interagency collaboration and establishing local councils to provide input into DSS planning occurs at the local level.

Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual report of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 39 is rated as a Strength because the State collaborates with internal and external partners in the development of the Annual Progress and Services Report for the CFSP.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the Child Welfare Stakeholders Advisory Committee provides a broad-based community voice in improvement of outcomes. The committee provides input into the CFSP and Annual Progress and Services Report, as well as the Statewide Assessment and the Program Improvement Plan resulting from the CFSR.

Item 40. The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 40 is rated as a Strength because the agency engages in extensive collaboration with other agencies at the State level to ensure the coordination of services. However, stakeholder interviews and case reviews indicated that there is less consistent coordination of services at the local level.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DSS contracts with Mental Health for co-location of Mental Health staff in county DSS offices for family preservation and reunification services. DSS contracts for other services with private non-profit providers. Budget reductions of DSS (elimination of \$10 million in community contracts) have affected its ability to support interagency initiatives. Several stakeholders provided services under those contracts. DSS meets regularly with its partner agencies, yet effectiveness of the coordination's impact on service delivery varies.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR were in general agreement that coordination among agencies was effective at the State level but less consistently effective at the county level. Stakeholders expressed particular concern about the coordination of services at the local level between DSS and the Department of Education, noting that local school districts often do not want foster children to attend their schools because of their disruptive behaviors and that the State often has to intervene legally to obtain services for these children.

X. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4

South Carolina is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment and retention. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 41. The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions, which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

This item is rated as a Strength because the State of South Carolina has consistently implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that conform to recognized national guidelines.

According to the Statewide Assessment, South Carolina has established standards in agency policy and regulations for foster family care and by regulation for residential group care. Revised standards for family-based care enhance safety by increasing pre-service

and annual in-service training, reducing the maximum number of children, and expanding the family study. Revised group care regulations also enhance safety and well being by increasing staff training requirements, and improving health, safety and sanitation standards. DSS also licenses child-placing agencies that license and approve foster and adoptive homes. Families licensed as foster parents must meet the standards for family care in regulations, and DSS staff reviews a sample of re-licensing studies.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that the State has licensing standards that ensure the safety of children in foster care, including training requirements as well as background checks and facility checks.

Item 42. The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

This item is rated as a Strength because South Carolina's licensing standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State uses the same standards for licensure of relative and non-relative caregivers. Some requirements can be waived for relatives on a case by case basis if not a safety issue. In court-ordered emergency placements with relatives, an emergency study to assess for safety and appropriateness, as well as Central Registry and sex offenders checks, are required before placement.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite review noted that there is no difference in standards for relative and non-relative foster homes.

Item 43. The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

This item is rated as a Strength because the State completes a criminal records clearance prior to the approval of all foster and adoptive homes.

According to the Statewide Assessment, State Statute requires FBI and State Law Enforcement background checks for all adult household members for foster care providers. In addition, DSS policy requires that families who want to be approved only as an adoption resource have criminal records and Central Registry checks. State law prohibits licensure of a foster home or approval of an adoptive home if a household member has an indicated report of abuse or neglect.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that the State conducts FBI checks and background CPS checks for all foster homes and relatives. Licenses are not issued without a completed criminal background check.

Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

This item is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because, although the State has in place a process for Statewide recruitment of foster and adoptive homes that reflect the needs of children requiring placement, there is no comprehensive plan for diligent recruitment that is implemented in the counties.

According to the Statewide Assessment, South Carolina increased the number of licensed foster families by 27 percent from 1999 to 2002. This increase was attributed to a DSS priority on recruitment, funding for local activities, and county assessments that include assessment of diligent recruitment. The Statewide Assessment notes that each county and adoption office completes an annual assessment of need for resource families, with need-specific recruitment initiated based on the assessment. In addition, The Casey Family to Family initiative and increased outreach in the faith community are recent efforts to increase effectiveness of agency recruitment and retention.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFPSR reported that each county has a recruitment plan based on its needs and that adoption recruitment is targeted toward the racial and ethnic diversity of adoptable children. However, Lexington County stakeholders noted that they have a plan in place for minority recruitment, but it is not being implemented due to a lack of staff resources. State-level stakeholders acknowledged that very few counties have staff specialized to conduct recruitment, and the State DSS encourages the counties to engage all staff, even secretaries, in recruitment efforts.

Item 45. The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

This item is rated as a Strength because the State conducts various recruitment initiatives to promote and facilitate the cross-jurisdictional placement of waiting children.

According to the Statewide Assessment, South Carolina uses numerous specialized recruitment efforts for children waiting for permanent placements. This includes the use of the media, postings of children, adoption fairs and parties, sharing information at local community events, registration with adoption exchanges including AdoptUSKids, and a toll-free number for families to use. The Statewide Assessment also notes that DSS is collaborating with Georgia in the *Children's Bureau Adoption Opportunities Tale of Two States Research Project* to identify and address barriers. This project includes online matching meetings through a secured chat room where caseworkers share information about children and families in their caseloads.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR reported that DSS uses a range of cross-jurisdictional options to facilitate permanent placements for children. These include the ICPC, national adoption exchanges, the DSS adoption website, AdoptUs Kids, a special project in collaboration with the State of Georgia, and the Southeastern Exchange.

XI. DETERMINATION OF SUBSTANTIAL CONFORMITY

For each outcome and systemic factor listed below, mark “Y” where the State is determined to be in substantial conformity and “N” where the State is determined not to be in substantial conformity. For each outcome or systemic factor marked “N,” place a check beside the performance indicator, listed by item number in this form, that has been determined to be an area needing improvement.

Outcomes

I. Safety

Y Outcome S1
___ Item 1
___ Item 2

N Outcome S2
X Item 3
X Item 4

II. Permanency

N Outcome P1
___ Item 5
X Item 6
X Item 7
X Item 8
X Item 9
___ Item 10

N Outcome P2
___ Item 11
___ Item 12
X Item 13
X Item 14
X Item 15
X Item 16

III. Child and Family Well-Being

N Outcome WB1
X Item 17
X Item 18
X Item 19
X Item 20

N Outcome WB2
X Item 21

N Outcome WB3
X Item 22
X Item 23

Systemic Factors

IV. Y Statewide Information System
___ Item 24

V. N Case Review System
X Item 25
___ Item 26
X Item 27
X Item 28
X Item 29

VI. Y Quality Assurance System
___ Item 30
___ Item 31

VII. Y Training
___ Item 32
___ Item 33
___ Item 34

VIII. N Service Array
X Item 35
X Item 36
___ Item 37

IX. Y Agency Responsiveness to the Community
___ Item 38
___ Item 39
___ Item 40

X. Y Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention
___ Item 41
___ Item 42
___ Item 43
___ Item 44
___ Item 45