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November 14 and 15, 2007 Mini CFSR Report¹
Albany County (Laramie) Department of Family Services (DFS) – D8R3

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Three ~~Four~~ strongest review areas (all scoring 100% in this round):

- **Safety 1 (S1)** - Children are safe when DFS is involved; this item has been consistent and scored 100% in all four rounds of Mini CFSRs.
- **Safety 2 (S2)** - Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible; this item has scored 100% in 3 out of 4 rounds of Mini CFSRs.
- **Permanency 2 (P2)** - Family relationships are preserved for children in placement; this outcome has scored 100% in 3 out of 4 rounds of Mini CFSRs.
- **Well Being 3 (WB3)** - Physical and mental health needs of children are met; this outcome has scored 100% in 3 out of 4 rounds of Mini CFSRs.

Greatest strengths from stakeholder interviews:

- Positive perception of DFS within Albany County;
- district court is appreciative of DFS and supportive, and
- SAGE initiative approach to child welfare cases.

Review challenge area:

- Coordination and communication between the legal community, law enforcement and DFS;
- because of multiple reasons, an adoption exceeded 24 months;
- location and involvement of absent parents, and
- lack of dental services for foster children in the community.

Issues for DFS administrative level consideration:

- Policy clarification for notification and involvement of absent parents in voluntarily assessment cases;
- clarification of multi track intake for consistency among all DFS offices, and
- service provision effected by delays in approval from financial services.

¹ The Mini CFSR instrument that is used as the foundation for the review process can be viewed at <http://wycrp.org>.

² Because of the excellent results of this review, four areas of strength were highlighted in this debriefing report.

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Case Ratings:

#D1452 - 3 areas needing improvement: Item 17³- Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents (overall rating); Item 18 - Child and family involvement in case planning and Item 20 - Worker visits with parent(s); (**case worker did a great job getting a mother to accept services in an assessment case**).

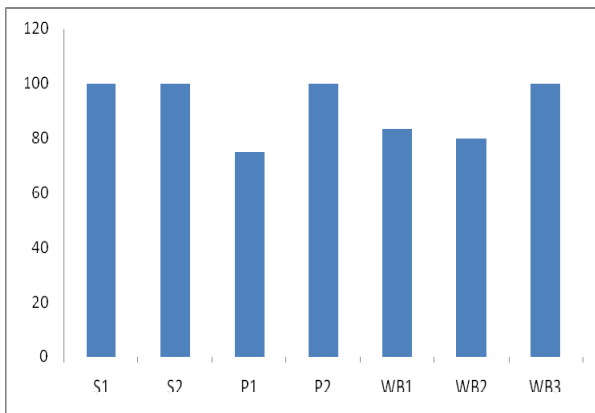
#D1453 - 1 area needing improvement: Item 9 - Adoption⁴. (**biological parents were cooperative in the case which assisted the adoption**).

#D1454 - 2 areas needing improvement: Item 6 - Stability of foster care placement and Item 15 - Relative placement; (**dad's mental illness influenced the case but wrap around services were extensive**).

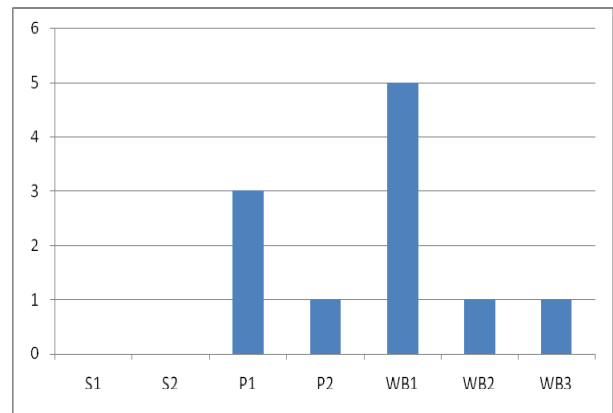
#D1457 - Perfect scoring case. (**mother's willingness to stick it out and do what needs to be done and the SAGE initiative have kept this case going**).

#R3455 - 3 areas needing improvement: Item 7 - Permanency goal for child; Item 17⁵ Needs and services of child parents, foster parents and Item 18 - Child and family involvement in case planning; (**mother's resistance to services and admitting that her son had behavioral issues negatively influenced the case**).

#R3456 - 2 areas needing improvement: Item 21 - Educational needs of the child and item 22 - Physical health of the child; (**even though case was a juvenile services case, safety was assessed and addressed**).



The graph above shows the percentage composite scores of this Mini CFSR review with the greatest strengths being in the areas of Safety 1, Safety 2, Permanency 2 and Well being 3; the lowest area being in Permanency 1.



The graph above shows the number of Mini CFSR instrument items rating as "areas needing improvement" in the broad outcome categories of safety, permanency and well-being. A total of five cases were reviewed.

³ 17b failed and is a sub rating for item 17; 17b deals with the assessments of the parents needs and then the services provided based on those assessments.

⁴ Please see further explanation on page 4: Opportunities for Improvement; legal, bullet point #4.

⁵ 17b failed and is a sub rating for item 17; 17b deals with the assessments of the parent's needs and then the services provided based on those assessments.

Strengths:

- Education:
 - Tutoring services were offered and are being successfully used by the child;
 - Individual Education Plan (IEP) was beneficial for the child and supported by DFS, and homework club and tutor were offered to help the child stay caught up in school.

- Effective case planning and work:
 - Good identification of safety issues by caseworker and the caseworker saw that the issues got addressed;
 - workers did a good job locating biological father and involving him in the case;
 - good documentation in the case file;
 - case worker did an outstanding job of engaging mother in an assessment case;
 - children felt and were very safe in their foster home;
 - case workers diligence and investment in family were great resulting in every other day visits;
 - good search for biological father by caseworker;
 - concurrent planning occurred in the case;
 - good communication with bio parents by all involved in the case;
 - even though father had been substantiated against for sexual abuse in another case, the case worker has seen that he got all information in another child's case via certified mail;
 - case worker recognized how bonded children were with the mother and worked to preserve that bond throughout the case;
 - Peak Wellness was concerned about safety and felt twins needed to be separated with one being placed; bonding and attachment assessments were done and, DFS sent results to Kemp Center for analysis ensuring the safety of the community while providing services to the family;
 - approachable and communicative demeanor of the DFS office manager and CPS supervisor;
 - children and mother felt that they were involved in the case planning process, and
 - interstate compact for the protection of children (ICPC) home study was done which learned of the father's substantiation.

- Effective use of service array:
 - Mother has been offered counseling opportunities;
 - mother has been offered parenting classes;
 - SAGE Initiative, which is parent driven, is a great resource;
 - good use of family counseling services for mother, mother's boyfriend and daughter;
 - anger management counseling were provided for child;
 - a number of services were offered covering a wide gamut of services to preserve the family structure;
 - family and individual therapy were beneficial as reported by family members;
 - parents received parenting skills; all they had were basic life skills;
 - SAGE Initiative and wrap around services were very beneficial in the case;
 - foster mother took in all four children so they would not have to be separated;
 - True Thought program was a beneficial service;
 - HUB with Big Brothers and Big Sisters was reported as being helpful;
 - counseling for son; counselor was replaced to find a counselor who the child felt more comfortable working with;
 - PY (progressive youth) group was beneficial to child;
 - speech therapy for boy at child development center;
 - financial services were provided to help family be successful in their case plan;
 - mental health services provided for mother who advised she needed them;
 - case worker was able to find a client services from a faith based organization;
 - children could not be at home if it were not for the SAGE initiative;

- good mental health services provided in the case, and
 - equine therapy was used from a recommendation of the Kemp Center as a bonding and attachment method.
- Family Involvement and Support:
 - Good connections for child with mother and extended family;
 - both mother and father were involved in the case and are committed to the case success;
 - mother works at Wal-Mart to support her family despite disabilities;
 - mother accepted mentoring services from the foster family;
 - bio father stayed involved through conference calls;
 - mother is attached to children and willing to do what she needs to do and learn how to deal with her children, and
 - mother has had stable employment for six years and has been stable in her housing.
 - Legal:
 - DFS received good direction from District Court Judge, and
 - Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) applicability was identified by the case worker and pursued through certified case letter and good case documentation.

Opportunities for improvement:

- Case planning and work:
 - Include individual education plan (IEP) in case file;
 - children remained in a crisis center for ten days before they entered foster care despite Albany County having an abundance of foster homes;
 - no written permanency goal included in case plan, but everyone involved in the case knew what it was, and
 - mother was not involved in case planning.
- Use of service array:
 - General feeling that Peak Wellness is focused on activities such as eating together versus other important issues surrounding the family.
- Family involvement and support:
 - Biologic father needed to be contacted in the case per federal review guidelines. and
 - parents relatives needed to be contacted and might have provided support services to the child.
- Legal:
 - Uncertain whether ICWA was asked about; father said yes and no;
 - for a year, the school and DFS tried to get the County Attorney to file a neglect petition;
 - often times consent decrees are the only option as cases take so long to get filed by the county attorney's office;
 - adoption not completed within twenty four (24) months; county attorney was reluctant to file termination of parental rights (TPR) and would not accept one of the parent's relinquishments without the other which delayed the adoption. The delay in finalizing the adoption subsidy agreement through DFS financial services also contributed to the delay; financial services did not accept community based special needs assessment;
 - case took a year to get the relinquishment and then another year to finalize permanency;
 - first guardian ad litem (GAL) was good; second GAL did not participate; parents felt that the GAL could have done more to push the adoption along, and
 - county attorney delayed final disposition.

- **Medical:**
 - Child did not receive routine dental checkups when appropriate, and
 - additional occupational therapy and related services could have been useful.

Systemic Barriers:

- **Education:**
 - School has not notified DFS about an upcoming IEP; DFS does not currently have custody of the children however.
- **Financial:**
 - Delays in finalizing the adoption subsidy agreement through DFS financial services caused delays in an adoption case; financial services did not accept community based special needs assessment.
- **Legal:**
 - It appears that there may be some coordination problems between the county attorney’s office and other child welfare entities including the court;
 - delays in disposition filings;
 - adoption cases have to start off as a new civil case even through there is an existing juvenile case; this causes delays in achieving permanency for children, and
 - ensure GAL is properly trained and screen for interest in GAL work.
- **Regional Issues:**
 - No dentist will take Medicaid payments in Laramie, and
 - lacking mental health services; two six (6) year olds placed at Wyoming Behavioral Institute WBI in Gillette.

Additional contributing factors:

- Mother never accepted that her son might have behavioral problems and subsequently was hesitant to have services provided.

Review process dynamics and considerations:

- Citizen reviewers in this review consisted of:
 - WYCRP administrative assistant;
 - WYCRP executive director;
 - Legislative Services auditor;
 - Legislative Services auditor;
 - University of Wyoming College of Social Work student and State of Wyoming intern with the Attorney General’s Division of Victim Services;
 - University of Wyoming College of Social Work student and Casey Family Programs intern, and
 - alumni.
- The period under review was October 1, 2006 through November 15, 2007.

Trend:

This review ranks as one of the best in the Mini CFSR process in Wyoming; collaboration and communication between DFS and other stakeholders in the community is phenomenal.

Trend:

While the SAGE initiative does not offer new services, it changes the approach so the parents are driving the case outside of DFS resulting in true family centered practice.

Stakeholder identified promising practices:

- Foster parents, their networking and coordination with DFS;
- SAGE Initiative embodies family centered practice through community based services that are parent driven. This provides a perfect match for the Albany County DFS philosophy;
- legal services at the University of Wyoming are suited to do short term legal work for DFS for the fee that DFS pays;
- an abundance of foster homes exist and foster homes are willing to take sibling groups; recruitment of foster parents is mostly through existing foster parents;
- district court judge has good standing in the community with both DFS and foster parents, and
- DFS sees district court as recognizing the importance of dealing with cases involving children and families in an expeditious and meaningful fashion.

Trend:

The Albany County DFS office believes in the importance of relationships with children, families and collaborators in the community; this has led them to be a leader in defining best practices in Wyoming.

Stakeholder Identified Issues:

- Coordination problems exist between the county attorney's office, law enforcement, DFS and other child welfare entities, including the court, resulting in a public perception that some reports are not followed up on;
- consent decrees without DFS involvement;
- mentoring program for foster parents;
- on call worker call out procedures through law enforcement dispatch does not always work;
- GALs would like to be involved in family partnerships;
- delays in filing of petitions and notices to DFS which delays services to families;
- adoption cases have to begin as a new civil case even through there is an existing juvenile case; this causes delays in achieving permanency for children;
- screen for interest in GAL work; some GALs show a lack of interest and have limited involvement in cases, and
- need for joint training opportunities with legal community, law enforcement and DFS.

Trend:

64 juvenile cases were filed in 2002 in district court by the Albany County Attorney's Office; that has declined to 49 in 2006.



Program Improvement Plan

Office determined strengths:

1. SAGE Initiative;
2. staff turnover is low in this office;
3. foster parent program; foster parents have good experiences with DFS, have placements and feel supported by the program and DFS;
4. foster parents are valued by DFS for the other things that they do to support bio parents and cases;
5. this DFS office is moving into a more productive era with the schools;
6. deputy county attorney assigned child welfare cases supports children;
7. district court supports DFS;
8. MOU between Department of Health Mental Health/Substance Abuse, DFS and Department of Corrections was drafted in a constructive fashion for the area;
9. small office allows good effective case work;
10. workers support each other emotionally;
11. system is family driven; families have a voice, drive the case and are involved in the case process;
12. more education and resources to find absent parents;
13. DFS workers realize that their clients are “normal, everyday” people just like themselves, and
14. TFC mental health respite care monies may become available.

Office determined needs, concerns and challenges:

1. SAGE Initiative grant is a five year program, 2 years into it now and starting the third year; need to make it self sustaining by the time the five year grant is done; funding has successfully been reduced already;
2. relationship with Ivinson Memorial Hospital;
3. working with others in the system to insure timelines are met;
4. notification and involvement of absent parents;
5. paperwork can be burdensome and prevent case workers from providing one on one services. One person handling routine paperwork would be good for:
 - a. freeing case workers up;
 - b. allow case workers more time for relationship building with families and children;
 - c. providing consistency for 4E, Medicaid and diligent searches, and
 - d. provide consistency among cases.
6. Tracking MDT's;
7. insuring timely court hearings; court docket if very full;
8. high case loads for juvenile services; worker has 30 cases with an ISP case load, and
9. MDT hearings every three months causes worker scheduling problems.

Office determined Program Improvement Plan for the upcoming year (PIP):

1. Becoming involved in an intrastate peer technical assistance (TA) initiative for foster care, concurrent case planning and the SAGE Initiative.