

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Indiana participated in a Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) that was conducted in accordance with section 1123(A) of the Social Security Act and sections 1355.31 through 1355.37 of Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the United States Department of Health and Human Services, has the responsibility for reviewing federally-funded child and family services programs to determine the States' substantial conformity with State plan requirements and other requirements under titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act.

The CFSR is a process in which ACF, in partnership with States, monitors and evaluates child and family services, including child protective services, family preservation and support, foster care, independent living and adoption services. The first phase of the CFSR consisted of the development of a State Profile, derived from data for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 1999 contained in the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and for Calendar Year 1999 from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). The profile highlighted key performance indicators related to safety and permanency for children entering the child welfare system. From this profile and other sources of information, Indiana developed a Statewide Assessment (SWA), which described the process, procedures and policies of its child protective services, including foster care and adoption. This SWA also focused on the systemic factors in place that enabled Indiana to carry out the program.

The second phase involved an on-site review, conducted in three local offices and in Indianapolis during August 20-24, 2001. The purpose of the on-site review was to assess the quality of services to abused or neglected children and to verify the information contained in the State Profile and SWA. This was accomplished by an intensive examination of 50 cases, drawn at random, of children who were active in the system during the period under review (April 1, 2000 through August 22, 2001). The cases included foster care and child protective service (in-home) cases.

Approximately 50 reviewers and team leaders, operating in State/Federal teams, reviewed and rated the services provided these children and their families, in relationship to the three goals of safety, permanency and well-being. The ratings were derived from documentation in the case records as well as from interviews with those involved with the cases, such as parents, caseworkers, foster parents, service providers and, when appropriate, the children themselves.

Individual and group interviews were also held with approximately 90 selected stakeholders who had the knowledge and experience to describe and assess the child and family services system. They included foster parents, judges, FSSA attorneys, birth parent attorneys, caseworkers and their supervisors, guardians ad litem, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), law enforcement, service providers and advocacy group representatives. The primary purpose of these interviews was to assess independently the quality and efficacy of the systemic factors described in the SWA.

The results of the SWA, the on-site case reviews and the stakeholder interviews were compiled by the review team into this report and were used to make a determination about Indiana's substantial conformity with regard to each of seven outcomes related to safety, permanency and well-being, and each of seven systemic factors.

Substantial conformity is based upon the State's ability to meet national standards; the criteria related to outcomes for children and families; and the criteria related to the State agency's capacity to deliver services leading to improved outcomes. Ninety percent of the cases must be rated as "substantially achieved" during a State's initial review for the State to be in substantial conformity for the outcomes.

This Executive Summary provides a synopsis of Indiana's performance on outcomes and the systemic factors.

PART A - PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

I. SAFETY

Status of Safety Outcome S1 (Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect) – Not in Substantial Conformity

The State received a rating of "Not in Substantial Conformity" for safety outcome S1 because it did not meet the national standard for repeat maltreatment. However, during the case review process, more than 90 percent of the cases reviewed were found to be in substantial conformity for S1 during the period under review (PUR) with respect to timeliness of investigations and repeat maltreatment.

A data discrepancy occurred in the performance indicator, repeat maltreatment. ACF informed the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) of this in a letter dated September 17, 2001. The FSSA informed ACF on November 16, 2001 that it would not resubmit data to resolve the discrepancy.

Strengths

- Over the past few years, there has been a major improvement in the State with respect to the timely completion of Child Abuse and Neglect (CA&N) investigations.
- Assessments and service interventions were timely.

Area Needing Improvement

- When subsequent CA&N allegations occurred on open cases in one locality, they were not always investigated as new CA&N reports, as is required by Indiana statute. This problem may be the result of (1) caseworkers not having a clear understanding of the policy, (2) a high level of staff turnover, (3) the lack of adequate staff training, and/or (4) the lack of clarity regarding the lines of responsibility.

Status of Safety Outcome S2 (Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate) – Not in Substantial Conformity

Indiana did not meet the initial case review standards for Safety Outcome S2 because only 83% of the applicable cases were rated as "substantially achieved" for the outcome.

Strengths

- Many and varied services were promptly initiated to prevent the removal of children from their homes.
- The title IV-E waiver allows DFC to put services in place to prevent children's removal from the home and to provide services to families that would otherwise not be eligible to receive these services.
- DFC was addressing the risk of harm either through the provision of services or through the removal of the children when services were unsuccessful.

Area Needing Improvement

- Assessments tended to focus on parents' service needs and ignore children's service needs. As a result, the needed services for children were not provided in some localities.
- After children were reunified with their families, DFC sometimes closed the case without providing post-reunification services, linking the family to community supports or ensuring that changes that occurred within the family were lasting ones.

II. PERMANENCY

Status of Permanency Outcome P1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations) – Not in Substantial Conformity

Permanency Outcome P1 was rated as "not in substantial conformity" based on the following findings:

- 88.2 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as "substantially achieved" for the outcome; and,
- The State did not meet the national standards for foster care re-entries, length of time to achieve reunification, length of time to achieve adoption, and stability of foster care placements.

A data discrepancy occurred in the performance indicator, foster care re-entries. ACF informed the FSSA of this in a letter dated September 17, 2001. The FSSA informed ACF on November 16, 2001 that it would not resubmit data to resolve the discrepancy.

Strengths

- Children were generally placed in the most appropriate settings with few disruptions.
- The frequency of permanency hearings exceeded the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, Public Law 105-89 (ASFA).
- The coordination among Division of Family and Children (DFC), the judiciary, and service providers contributed to the achievement of permanency in a timely manner.

- Relative adoptions and subsidized guardianships were considered a permanency resource and were supported by equivalent payments and supportive services.

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Area Needing Improvement

- The ability to finalize permanency in a timely manner was impacted by several factors: not engaging families in case planning; Family Case Management (FCM) turnover and inexperience; case plans and notes that do not reflect the current goal.
- Some foster care placements were disrupted by runaway episodes.
- There was no specifically identifiable Independent Living Program (ILP) section in the case plan.
- The length of time to achieve adoption was due to delays in adoptive family recruiting, securing home studies and the filing of court petitions.

Status of Permanency Outcome P2 (The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children) – Not in Substantial Conformity

Permanency Outcome P2 was rated as "not in substantial conformity" since 88.2 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as "substantially achieved" for the outcome.

Strengths

- When children were not placed close to their families, valid reasons were given.
- Siblings were placed together except where there was risk of harm.
- DFC supported regular visitation between children and their parents by arranging for and providing transportation, flexible scheduling and allowing visits to occur in the homes of foster families.
- Children were placed within the same community whenever possible.
- In many instances, placements with relatives occurred when they met licensing standards and it was in the best interests of the child to be placed with that relative.
- Children in care visited with their parents often.

Areas Needing Improvement

- The lack of public and private transportation made visitation difficult.
- In some localities, the DFC often because of FCM turnover was not preserving the continuity of the child's connections.
- Consistent identification and evaluation of relatives as a placement option did not occur in all cases.

III. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Status of Well-Being WB1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs) – Not in Substantial Conformity

Well-Being Outcome WB1 was rated as "not in substantial conformity" since 60 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as "substantially achieved" for the outcome.

Strengths

- There is a wide array of individualized services available in almost all jurisdictions.
- Much of the success in meeting the needs of children and their families can be attributed to the dedication of individual staff.
- In many cases, state visitation policy regarding FCM visits with parents is followed.

Areas Needing Improvement

- The services provided were not always linked to family needs.
- Children were not getting the services they needed because services were primarily focused on parents.
- The case plan used by DFC is lengthy and complex and consequently difficult for most family members to understand.
- In many cases, children and parents did not participate in case planning, especially in probation cases.
- When the DFC did not have primary responsibility for case management, the FCM practice on face to face visits with children fell short of State policy in approximately half the cases due to unclear policy, workload pressures, turnover and inexperience.
- FCM practice on parent visits fell short of State policy apparently because of workload pressures, turnover, inexperience and the FCM's perceived identity as case brokers.

Status of Well-Being WB2 (Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs) – Not in Substantial Conformity

Well-Being Outcome WB2 was rated as "not in substantial conformity" since 71.1 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as "substantially achieved" for the outcome.

Strength

- Concerted efforts are made by DFC to maintain children who are in foster care in their same school districts.

Area Needing Improvement

- In one locality, DFC follow-up on educational needs and problems was limited due to a high volume of cases and staffing shortages and in another locality, there was a lack of documentation addressing educational issues.

Status of Well-Being WB3 (Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs) – Not in Substantial Conformity

Well-Being Outcome WB3 was rated as "not in substantial conformity" since 70 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as "substantially achieved" for the outcome.

Strengths

- Evidence of annual check-ups and immunizations was found in many case records.
- Services were provided to meet identified health needs.
- In many instances, individualized mental health needs of children and their families were being addressed, and appropriate mental health referrals were made.

Areas Needing Improvement

- Immunizations were not documented in some case records. (source: case reviews)
- There was evidence that medical examinations were not always done in a timely manner.
- In some localities, children did not receive timely treatment for their mental health needs due to delays in assessment and service delivery.

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PART B. - SYSTEMIC FACTORS

IV. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Status: Substantial Conformity

Strengths

- The Indiana Child Welfare Information System (ICWIS) can identify the status, characteristics, location and goals for every child in foster care.
- Because the reliability of the ICWIS data has improved significantly, managers and administrators are now able to rely on ICWIS for program, quality assurance and budgetary decisions.

Areas Needing Improvement

- Many difficulties with ICWIS were identified.
- At times ICWIS training occurred before new staff has learned the child welfare program. ICWIS training is also limited to one site, and is not integrated into the new FCM competency-based training.

V. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Status: Substantial Conformity

Strengths

- Child-specific case plans are completed within 60 days of the child's entry into foster care.
- Periodic reviews by the court and permanency hearings were conducted more often than ASFA requires.
- As more of the ASFA reforms have taken root in the system, most of the terminations are now occurring within the ASFA timeframes.
- Most foster and adoptive parents were notified of hearings in a timely manner.

Areas Needing Improvement

- Indiana statute requires the filing of a TPR petition once the ASFA TPR timeframes have been reached even though DFC may believe TPR is not in the best interests of the child. This provision was put into statute to ensure that courts would be involved in the TPR decision making process. Subsequently DFC requests a dismissal of the petition from the court. ASFA allows for States to document in the case plan a compelling reason for determining that the filing of a TPR would not be in the best interests of a child. (source: stakeholder perceptions).

- Infrequent FCM visits with the family hindered the achievement of the permanency goal.
- Some case plans did not identify services and outcomes.

VI. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Status: Substantial Conformity

Strengths

- Standards were in place regarding the timeliness of CPS investigations, contacts, visitations, input into ICWIS, case planning conferences and outcome-based service delivery.
- All Indiana counties have now undergone quality assurance reviews that include the development of action plans to address any problems identified during the reviews.
- There is a focus on accountability with regular reporting required.

Area Needing Improvement

- None

VII. TRAINING

Status: Not in Substantial Conformity

Strengths

- A statewide comprehensive core training structure for new supervisors and FCM is in place.
- There is a wide variety of high-quality ongoing training available for supervisors and FCM.
- Foster/adoptive parents and residential child care staff are required to participate in pre-service and ongoing training.

Areas Needing Improvement

- Since new employees were assigned caseloads as soon as they were hired, it was difficult for them to attend training.
- Staff often have to wait a long time before receiving core training because of the limited number of available training slots and because training was not offered as frequently as needed.
- It is difficult for FCM to find time to attend ongoing training because of the demands of their caseloads.
- Many foster parents have difficulty accessing training because of its location and the time of day that it is offered.

VIII. SERVICE ARRAY

Status: Substantial Conformity

Strengths

- There was a wide array of flexible services available that had the capacity to meet the individual needs of children and families.
- There are statewide community-based wrap-around services available through a title IV-E waiver demonstration.
- The title IV-E waiver is used to individualize services.

Areas Needing Improvement

- The lack of individualized services in some localities was due to problems in case planning and the lack of comprehensive assessments.
- Shortages occurred statewide in foster homes for special needs children and for substance abuse and sexual perpetrator services.
- Getting to and from services was a problem especially outside of normal business hours and in most rural localities.

IX. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

Status: Substantial Conformity

Strengths

- Collaboration is a major strength of the DFC.
- CA&N Prevention Councils include information on services provided by DFC.
- DFC works closely with Head Start, Food Stamps, Public Housing and other federally assisted programs.

Area Needing Improvement

- Although DFC encouraged foster parent support groups in all localities, sustaining them was sporadic.

X. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Status: Substantial Conformity

Strengths

- DFC is updating foster home standards in response to a series of foster parent focus groups.
- Licensing standards are applied to both related and unrelated foster families.
- Criminal background checks are conducted on all individuals residing in foster family homes and on all staff employed in child care institutions.
- Foster homes are reflective of the population in care in many localities.

Area Needing Improvement

- There was a major need to focus on recruiting additional foster parents, especially those who can address the mental health needs or developmental disabilities needs of children, thereby reducing the reliance on residential care.
- Families were lost due to long delays between training and the initiation of home studies and licensing by the DFC.
- There are differences between some of the 1946 standards and current practice.