

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

## I. The Goals, Mission, Vision, and Desired Outcomes for the Children's Services System

The state Division of Social Services and 100 county Departments of Social Services share in their commitment to excellence in providing services to children and their families. To that end, they share common goals, mission, vision, and desired outcomes for the Children's Services System.

There are three main **Goals** for the Children's Services System. They are to achieve Safety, Permanence, and Well-being for all children in North Carolina.

Our **Mission** for the Children's Services System is to ensure safe, permanent, nurturing families for children.

Our **Vision** is to build a system that accomplishes the following:

- Community-Based Support for All Families that promotes the family's ability to cope with difficult situations and resolve family problems.
- One Coordinated Assessment Process that involves the family in a comprehensive evaluation of their strengths and needs.
- One Caseworker or Casework Team that ensures everyone is working together toward a permanent plan for the child.
- One Single, Stable Foster Care Placement within the child's own community that provides temporary stability until a lifelong home for the child is achieved.
- A Safe and Permanent Home within One Year for all children for whom a county department of social services has legal custody or placement responsibility.

The **Desired Outcomes** for Children's Services are to:

1. Protect children from abuse and neglect.
2. Reduce recurrence of abuse and neglect.
3. Maintain children safely in their own homes.
4. Prevent inappropriate entry into foster care.
5. Reduce abuse and neglect in foster care.

6. Provide permanence and stability for children in their living situations.
7. Reduce time in foster care to permanence within one year or less.
8. Reduce reentry into foster care.
9. Support and sustain continuity of family relationships and family connections.
10. Increase the capacity of families to provide for children.
11. Promote appropriate education services for children.
12. Arrange for adequate mental health and physical health services for children.
13. Limit placement of young children in group homes and institutions.

## II. Purpose of Child and Family Services Reviews

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

The review process is designed to measure outcomes and practice. The process also provides public accountability for all 100 county Departments of Social Services and for the Children's Services System statewide.

## III. Confidentiality

All requirements for confidentiality as stated in federal and state statutes, administrative rules and in Chapters IV, VI and VIII, Volume I, Children's Services of the Family Services Manual for the North Carolina Division of Social Services shall be followed. No identifying, case specific information will be incorporated in the Child and Family Services review report.

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

## IV. Review Coordination

### A. Review Team

Staff from the Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section will serve as Lead Reviewer for the reviews. Each county is urged to designate staff to serve, along with Division staff, on the review team.

Each county reviewer will be paired with a Division reviewer to work as a team. The lead reviewer will provide quality control for records reviewed.

B. Counties to be Reviewed

All 100 county Departments of Social Services will be reviewed. Three months prior to the scheduled review, the Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section will notify each county Director of the week of their review. The beginning date of the review will be determined at a later time. When that date has been determined, the county will be notified.

C. Notification Process

An information packet will be sent to the county director by the Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section three months prior to the week scheduled for the review. Included in this packet are the following:

1. A standardized notification letter to the county director identifying the week scheduled for the review
2. Lists of children whose names appear in the State automated database as having received Case Planning/Case Management and Foster Care services during the period from which a sample will be selected
3. Instructions for submitting the following information to the Team Leader of the Data Management and Review Team within ten days of the date of the notification letter.
  - A log or listing of CPS reports that were accepted for investigative assessment during the six-month sample period and were subsequently unsubstantiated or substantiated and closed immediately.
  - Verification that cases listed in the State automated database as having received Case Planning/Case Management and Foster Care Services were active for a minimum of sixty days during the review period.
  - The name of county staff whom the director designates as the Agency Review Coordinator.
  - The names of any county staff whom the director designates as part of the review team.
  - The names and addresses of the chair of the county board of social services, the county manager, and the chair of the county commissioners who will receive the final report.
  - The names and addresses of the chair of the Community Child Protection Team, Guardian Ad Litem Administrator, agency

attorney, chief district court judge, and the chair of the Foster Parent Association. These individuals, as well as the chair of the county board of social services, are identified as community stakeholders who will receive a questionnaire from the division.

4. An outline for the Agency Self-Report and a copy of the Agency Self-Survey form. The Agency Self-Report and Self-Survey are to be completed by the agency and are to be submitted to the Team Leader of the Data Management and Review Team within thirty days of the date of the notification letter with a copy to the Children's Program Representative. It is preferred that this information be submitted electronically, either on disk or through e-mail attachment in a format that can be accessed by the Division. The purpose of the report and survey is to provide information related to Children's Services program and system issues in the county.

The Agency Self-Report will be incorporated into the final review report. This provides the agency with the opportunity to identify agency and program strengths, to offer a self-evaluation of outcomes data, to describe any changes that the agency has instituted since the last review, and to comment on any areas needing improvement in the county's Children's Services System.

#### V. Sample to be Reviewed and Review Period

A combination of Reports Not Accepted for CPS Investigative Assessment, CPS Investigative Assessment cases, CPS Case Planning/Case Management cases, and Child Placement cases will be reviewed.

Cases to be reviewed will be selected from cases that were open for services during the six months prior to the month preceding the date of the notification letter. That is, if the date of the notification letter is in the month of December, cases will be selected from the six months prior to the month of November, or May through October. **This is the sampling period.** Selected cases will be assessed for their level of outcome achievement beginning with the sampling period, and ending at the time of the on-site review. **This is the review period.**

A sample of Reports Not Accepted for CPS Investigative Assessment will be selected by the Lead Reviewer on site from the agency's files. CPS Investigative Assessment cases will be selected from the CPS log submitted by the agency, the names of which will be provided to the agency review coordinator at the time of the Entrance Conference. CPS Case Planning/Case Management cases will be selected from cases open for 215 services as indicated in the Division's automated information system. Child Placement cases will be selected from the list of all children

open for services on the PQA 084. All cases in both Case Planning/Case Management and Child Placement must have received a minimum of sixty days services during the **review** period.

VI. Agency Review Coordinator's Responsibilities

- Coordinate with the designated lead reviewer from the Division regarding any of their responsibilities listed here;
- Select, according to criteria discussed below under *Case Selection and Review*, the cases to be reviewed from the random pre-sample received from the Division;
- Orient local staff to the purpose and activities of the review;
- Ensure that workers (supervisor, if worker is not available) assigned to the cases selected for review are scheduled for interviews on their case(s);
- Schedule and confirm interviews with each person involved in a case who is to be interviewed and orient those persons to the purposes of the review (see attached sample letter);
- Prepare a listing of scheduled interviews for each review member that includes the name of the person to be interviewed, the time, date, and type of interview, whether office visit or telephone;
- Reserve space for record review, interviews, and other planned meetings;
- Assemble all case records to be reviewed so that they will be accessible and ready for review at the onset of the review;
- It is not necessary for the agency to provide copies of the instrument for the record review. Review instruments will be provided by the review team.

VII. Case Selection and Review

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

Sample cases must have been open for services a minimum of 60 days during the period under review, even though services may be closed at the time of the on-site review. Cases eligible for review may fall into one of the following categories:

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

- Opened for services during the six-month sampling period, and at least 60 days services provided prior to the on-site review.

A pre-sample consisting of 18 or less Foster Care cases and 18 or less Case Planning/Case Management cases will be randomly selected from the population of cases in the county identified as active for sixty days. This pre-sample will be sent to the Agency Review Coordinator 45 days prior to the on-site review. From this listing, the Agency Review Coordinator will select, according to criteria, a smaller sub-sample totaling 6-12 cases for review. The Agency Review Coordinator should provide the names of the cases in this sub-sample to the Division 14 days prior to the on-site review.

Agency child and family services other than those for which the record was selected for review that were provided during the review period will also be reviewed. For example, if a case was selected for review for Case Planning/Case Management and Foster Care Services became necessary, the Foster Care Services will be reviewed. If a case was selected for review for either Case Planning/Case Management or Foster Care Services and a CPS report was accepted in the review period in that case, the Investigative Assessment conducted in response to that report will be reviewed.

Number of Cases to be reviewed:

**Level III counties** will have six Placement cases, six Case Planning/Case Management cases, six cases that were either unsubstantiated or substantiated and closed, and twenty reports not accepted for Investigative Assessment.

**Level II counties** will have four Placement cases, four Case Planning/Case Management cases, five cases that were either unsubstantiated or substantiated and closed, and twelve reports not accepted for Investigative Assessment.

**Level I counties** will have three Placement cases, three Case Planning/Case Management cases, four cases that were either unsubstantiated or substantiated and closed, and eight reports not accepted for Investigative Assessment.

Interviews may not be possible in all Case Planning/Case Management and Placement cases in the pre-sample. Therefore, the Agency Review Coordinator should select the cases for the review from the random listing of 36 or less cases using the criteria below:

- The Agency Review Coordinator must select cases that meet the criteria listed in the bullets below. The selection must begin with the first case listed on the pre-sample provided by the Division and

- proceed in order until the required number of cases is reached.
- The Agency Review Coordinator should determine if the individuals in the case who must be interviewed are willing and available for interviews and can be scheduled during the review week. The case may be rejected and the next case on the list considered only under the following circumstances:
    - ◆ In all Case Planning/Case Management and Placement cases, if the primary social worker or supervisor and parent or other caretaker, at minimum, are either unavailable or unwilling to be interviewed such that sufficient information cannot be obtained to complete the review instrument, or
    - ◆ If the case was pulled in error and had not been open for services for a minimum of sixty days during the review period.
    - ◆ If the child selected is a sibling (possibly with a different last name) of a child previously selected.
    - ◆ If the social worker was the worker for a case previously selected, except in smaller counties where there are fewer social workers.
  - The Agency Review Coordinator must record the reasons for eliminating any cases from the sample of cases to be reviewed and make that information available to the Lead Reviewer.
  - The cases in the sample of 36 or less cases that are not selected for review will be used:
    - ◆ To substitute for cases in the sample of 36 or less that cannot be reviewed for the reasons listed above, and
    - ◆ To provide a pool of additional cases to be reviewed, if needed.

### Case Interviews

The review team member(s) assigned a particular case is responsible for interviewing the individuals involved in the case, as well as reviewing the case record.

Reasonable efforts should be made to schedule interviews with the following persons for each case selected for review:

- The social worker or supervisor most knowledgeable of the case.
- Whenever possible, children 12 years of age or older who are cognitively and emotionally able to participate.
- The appropriate parents, foster parents, relative caretakers, pre-adoptive or adoptive parents. (No parents whose rights have been terminated)
- The Guardian Ad Litem.

In addition:

- Availability of a major service provider or other person who has knowledge of the family's situation who can be contacted if the scheduled interviews with any of the persons other than the social worker or supervisor can not be conducted.

The interviews with the individuals in a case should follow the time designated on the reviewer's schedule for reviewing the case record. Without first becoming familiar with the circumstances of the case through a review of the record, the reviewer will be unable to explore pertinent issues with the person being interviewed. (See Attachment-Sample Interview Schedule) The Agency Review Coordinator should schedule the interviews in 30-minute intervals. When scheduling interviews, it should be remembered that it might be necessary to interview some persons (e.g. GAL's) for more than one case. Therefore, care should be given in scheduling their interviews to avoid lapses or overlapping of time.

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

#### Preparation of Records for Review

All records pertaining to each child reviewed should be pulled and made available to the review team at the beginning of the on-site review. This includes child protective service records, child and family records, and placement provider records. Case records should be as orderly and up-to-date as possible, with materials in chronological order. If the agency uses electronic files instead of paper files, it will be necessary for the Agency Review Coordinator to either make computers and technical support available to the reviewers or obtain hard copies of the files, or the portions of the files containing information relevant to the review.

#### Local Stakeholder Questionnaires

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

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



encourage them to complete and return the questionnaire to the Division.

### VIII. Review Process

At the time of the review, the reviewers will hold an entrance conference with the agency director and any staff or others at the discretion of the director. This conference will include:

1. Introductions of Division and agency staff
2. A discussion of the review process, data, and report
3. Issues raised in the Agency Self-Report and Self-Survey
4. An opportunity for the county to discuss and clarify any information pertinent to their individual agency and ask any questions about the review
5. Any information that the agency can share regarding agency protocol, procedures, and record keeping practices that could aid the reviewers in the review process.

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

Individual state/county review teams will examine the case records to measure the county's performance related to outcomes. Findings from the record review along with supporting/clarifying information obtained from interviews will be documented on the review instrument.

When the review instrument, appropriate interviews, and the case rating summary have been completed for each case, each state/county review team will present their case(s) to the entire review team, which includes the Agency Review Coordinator, for debriefing. Debriefings will likely occur several times during the course of the on-site review. The agency director and/or designated management and supervisory staff are welcome to attend the de-briefing sessions. Questions and challenges will be addressed at this time.

If, at the time of debriefing a case, there are any unresolved issues or the team cannot reach consensus, the lead reviewer will contact the Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section management for a final decision on the issue. Once consensus is reached or a decision has been made on each case being debriefed, it is recommended that the Agency Review Coordinator arrange for the review instruments to be copied for agency use. After all of the cases have been debriefed, the entire review team will participate in completing the County Rating Summary in preparation for the exit conference.

An exit conference will be held at the conclusion of the review to present an overview of the findings of the review. Participants at the exit conference will include members of the Review Team, the director, and staff members or others at the director's discretion. The purpose of the exit conference is to provide closure to the review process and to provide general findings from the review process.

There will be an opportunity for questions about the Review Team's findings, for comments about the findings, and for identification of anything that the county would like reflected in the review report. The director will be informed that a Review Evaluation Form will be attached to the agency final report. The Director, or his designee, will be urged to complete the evaluation form and return it to the Data Management and Review Team Leader.

#### IX. Compilation of Results and Preparation of Reports

The Division will prepare the review report, which will include analysis of all outcomes of the review and relevant data. The analysis will focus on broad program issues, identifying strengths, and areas for improvement. Information provided by the county DSS in the Agency Self-Report will be incorporated in the review report.

A formal Program Improvement Plan will be required for any outcome in which the agency did not achieve substantial conformity. The Program Improvement Plan should also include Reports Not Accepted For Investigative Assessment when more than one report was rated as needing improvement in Level I counties, and when more than two reports were rated as needing improvement in Level II and in Level III counties.

The Division will e-mail a draft copy of the Child and Family Services Review Report and a cover letter within thirty days from the last day of the record review if the county has e-mail access. Otherwise, the Division will fax or mail this draft copy. The agency will have the opportunity to review the report and provide any additional input that they want considered, as well as any formal response that the county wishes to be attached to the final review report. The county should submit their input and any formal response to the Division within ten workdays of receipt of the draft report. Input to the report and any formal response should be submitted to the Data Management and Review Team Leader, preferably electronically either by e-mail attachment or disk in a format that can be accessed by the Division.

The Division will consider the county's input and determine whether the report should be amended. The Data Management and Review Team Leader will discuss the county their input and any amendments to the report in an effort to reach an agreement on the final report. The final

review report and any formal response from the county will be sent simultaneously to the county DSS director, the chair of the county social services board, the chair of the county commissioners, and the county manager within ten days from the date of the county's input and response to the draft report or the date the county's input and response was due, whichever is sooner.

X. Follow-up Visit

The appropriate Children's Programs Representative (CPR) will contact the county within thirty days after the agency receives the draft report. This will provide an opportunity for the agency and the CPR to discuss the issues and recommendations contained in the report. The contact will also provide a time for the agency to receive positive feedback regarding practice issues. The CPR will provide consultation to the agency in implementing any recommended changes.

XI. Conclusion

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

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