

**Continuous Quality Improvement
Quality Service Review**

FINAL REPORT

*May 5th - May 9th 2008
La Crosse County Human Services*

**Child Welfare Continuous Quality Improvement Program
Office of Performance and Quality Assurance
Department of Children and Families**

*A Report by
The Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Team*

June 23, 2008

I. INTRODUCTION

The Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Program, within the Office of Performance and Quality Assurance (OPQA), of the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF), uses the Quality Service Review (QSR) protocol to evaluate the case practice models of Wisconsin's county child welfare programs. The QSR generates useful information for county staff and community stakeholders as to outcomes for children and families served, strengths of local practice, and opportunities for improving system performance.

The QSR process also provides an opportunity to gather additional information the department will use in reporting some federally required information, which is part of the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR).

The Continuous Quality Improvement Team conducted a Quality Service Review in La Crosse County during the week of May 5-9, 2008. During the same week, staff from the Children's Court Initiative (CCI) conducted a review of the Juvenile Court. CCI is a comprehensive, ongoing, collaborative project designed to strengthen court processing in Chapter 48 cases.

Note: This Final Report was completed after July 1, 2008 when the new Department of Children and Families formally came into existence. Only the title page and footnote have been amended to reflect issuance by the new department on July 15, 2008. Within the report the names of divisions, bureaus and sections remain as they were referenced as parts of the Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS).

II. THE LA CROSSE COUNTY REVIEW

A. REVIEWERS

In the La Crosse County review, a combination of CQI Specialists, county child welfare workers and retired child welfare professionals participated in reviewing the twelve cases selected. Three of the reviewers served as both a lead case reviewer and a mentor to each of their review partners or "shadows," who were observed and coached in their development as a lead case reviewer. All the lead case reviewers who provided coaching have extensive experience in child welfare. A local college professor served as a Shadow 1, a role created to allow child welfare stakeholders to experience a QSR review.

B. CASE SAMPLE

Twelve cases were randomly selected for review in La Crosse County. In each case, one child was selected as the "focus child." Every attempt is made to stratify the case sample across workers and ages and genders of children. A family must agree to participate in the review process and sign releases for participants to be interviewed by the review team, or the case is not selected. In the La Crosse review, a total of 114 persons were

interviewed. Of the twelve cases, four were in-home cases and eight were out-of-home cases. One child was in the 0-4 age range, five children were in the 5-9 age range, three children were in the 10-13 age range, and three children were over the age of 13. There were four males and eight females in the sample.

C. STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

As a complement to the individual case reviews, focus groups were conducted with stakeholders from the local child welfare system. Site leader Harry Hobbs conducted these sessions with the assistance of Kimberly Kelly and Carrie Finkbiner, CQI Specialists. In addition, Bridget Bauman and John Strange of the Children's Court Initiative conducted sessions jointly with the Site Leader for many of the focus groups. The external perspectives that were gathered provide a valuable source of insight and feedback about how the systems with which families are involved interface and perform with the child welfare agency, thereby affecting and influencing outcomes. The stakeholder focus groups and their perspectives are described in Section III.

D. DEMOGRAPHICS

La Crosse County is located in western Wisconsin directly on the Mississippi River. United States Census Bureau data from 2006 indicates the county's population as 109,404 with 94.1 % of the population being white and 3.3% Asian, both above the state average. Other ethnicities in the county include 1% Hispanic/Latino, 1.1% Black and .5% American Indian and Alaska Native, which are all below the state average. It was noted during focus groups that there has been a noticeable increase in the Black population over the past several years. The Asian population in the county is mainly of Hmong ethnicity.

La Crosse County has a higher than average percentage of high school graduates and persons with Bachelor's degrees, which may be due to the fact that there are several institutions of higher learning in the county. The median household income in 2004 was about \$4,000 less than the state average and 11.9% of people in the county were below the poverty level as opposed to 10.9% at the state level.

III. THE SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVE (MACRO VIEW)

A. ORGANIZATIONAL – STRENGTHS

Undoubtedly one of the greatest strengths discussed in focus groups was the front line staff at La Crosse County Department of Human Services/Family and Children's Section (FCS). The case workers were described as thoughtful in case planning, caring, creative and having a good relationship with community partners. Many noted that over the last few years the FCS staff has stabilized, thus the case workers are becoming well versed in these complex positions. The senior workers are assisting the junior workers in building knowledge and skill in the area of child welfare. The La Crosse County Department of Human Services is viewed as being "on the cutting edge" in creating a model of service delivery to the community. Stakeholders recognized that FCS is not using a cookie cutter

approach in working with children and families, but providing individualized services while trying to remain community based. Examples of this are the development and implementation of the Community Response team and crisis response planning, which will be discussed later in this report. The Alternate Care Unit and Special Needs Unit are two internal units that focus group members noted as assets to the organization. The Alternate Care Unit offers additional support, guidance and training to county licensed foster parents. The Special Needs Unit is a unique addition to FCS that provides prevention and intervention services for a range of children in a special needs population that can sometimes be challenging for front line workers. This unit is supervised and staffed by individuals with specialized backgrounds to provide greater insight into the needs of this population.

The administration was described as being vested in ensuring a culture at FCS that is collaborative and supportive of a family centered approach. This is demonstrated in a strong teaming approach that encourages parental involvement with a role and voice in personal service array. Not only does FCS model this to families, but internally as well. Recently a worker retention committee was initiated and as a result, the concept of case teaming/partnering was developed and implemented. Teaming/partnering is a method of assigning two case workers to a family case. Front line workers appreciate having a peer to partner with on daily case work. Through this retention committee case workers feel they were given a role in problem solving worker retention issues.

The agency supervisors were said to be accessible to workers and embrace an “open door policy”. Weekly unit meetings are held, as well as individual case staffings in order for workers to receive the necessary support and guidance on specific case issues.

B. ORGANIZATIONAL – CHALLENGES

With the implementation of several new federal and state child welfare policies and procedures there is an exceedingly large number of tasks that a front line worker must accomplish, many within short time frames. One consequence of these increasing requirements is the challenge of trying to balance face time with families against computer time to enter the required data and case information. Focus group members said that several of the forms that need to be completed require some of the same information, thus valuable time is spent duplicating work. The Permanency Plan in the Wisconsin Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (WiSACWIS) is thought to be cumbersome and the end result may be too lengthy and confusing to digest. It was also noted that the Initial Assessment form in WiSACWIS is more focused on family needs instead of family strengths that could be built upon.

Another organizational challenge is the overall need to identify and assess relatives as potential placement resources earlier in the life of the case. Focus group members cited specific examples of relatives that were identified later in the life of a child’s placement in protective custody, thus creating a scenario where a child may become bonded to a foster family, yet a relative resource is also available for placement. This was noted to be particularly important with cases where a termination of parental rights could occur and

an adoptive resource is being sought. Another area concerning relative placements that was brought forth in focus groups is the lack of formal supports and/or resources available to relative providers with court ordered kinship placements. While the Alternate Care Unit provides support to agency licensed foster parents, kinship placements are given less attention and do not have an assigned case worker that they can utilize for support.

C. RESOURCES – STRENGTHS

La Crosse County is fortunate in that it has an abundant array of resources and services that can be offered to children and families. There are two hospitals that provide inpatient and outpatient psychiatric services. Private agencies can offer Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA) assessments and treatment, psychological evaluations and domestic violence services. Other community resources offer individual, family and in-home counseling and support, parenting education programs, after school programs and support services for children with special needs (e.g. Asperger's support group). There are agencies in the community that collaborate with La Crosse County Human Services to provide parenting support and training, in-home safety checks, transitional support for children and families and Independent Living Programs for youth. The Independent Living Program was regarded as a valuable program to assist youth into adulthood, and eventually emancipation from the agency. A private community agency is in the process of being contracted to perform crisis planning/emergency response plans. There are two private agencies that contract with the county to provide special needs adoption services to children and families. Focus group members appreciated that some agencies are willing to be flexible in their roles when working with families, as this is helpful to match services to a family's individual needs. Focus groups also shared information about creative community based resources such as the Helping And Lending Outreach Support (HALOS) program that collaborates with the local faith based community to provide tangible items and services (e.g. transportation, furniture, hygiene kits, memory books) for families in need. La Crosse County Human Services offers an in-house training for potential foster and adoptive parents known as Partners in Alternative Care Education (PACE) training, and members of the focus group felt this was a helpful and informative pre-service training.

Overwhelmingly, the Community Response program was mentioned as a strength for the families of La Crosse County. This program is able to offer outreach service to families who have been "screened out" of the child protective services agency. These families tend to "fall through the cracks" in that they do not require formal intervention yet need some extra formal support. Community Response is able to provide preventive services on a voluntary basis. The only critique of this program was that Community Response workers are not as trained in safety issues as an Initial Assessment worker would be, but undoubtedly, focus group members see this service as an asset to their community. Another unit that was identified as a prevention mechanism was the internal Special Needs unit within Human Services, which was formerly mentioned as an organizational strength as well.

D. RESOURCES – CHALLENGES

While La Crosse County is rich in services, the challenge lies in the ability of families to access these services. There are a number of barriers that were listed in focus groups that contribute to services not being readily available. These barriers include the increasing cost that is attached to services for the county and wait lists to begin services. Many of these limitations are imposed on clients who utilize Medical Assistance. Another potential barrier recognized by focus group members is difficulty in accessing services due to lack of transportation. While there is a bus line that runs in the city of La Crosse and the county is able to provide bus passes for clients, it's not an option for those families who live outside of the city limit.

Focus group members recognized a need to develop mental health services designed for children instead of imposing an adult model onto youth. One particular area of service need is for children with Attachment Disorders. A more global need for the county is the development of trauma-informed assessment and responsive services to address the unique and ever changing needs of children and families involved in the child welfare system.

Numerous focus groups identified the growing population of African-Americans who are new to the community. It was recognized that there are no culturally competent services yet in place for this population. Another minority represented in the county is the Hmong community. There appears to be some culturally appropriate services for this population due to being in the area for a greater length of time, however; there is still a need for interpretive services when working with non-English speaking clients of this culture.

While La Crosse Human Services has been able to recruit and license a reasonable number of foster parents, focus group members feel this is area of concern in that it constantly needs to be replenished. Foster parents leave the resource pool for a number of personal reasons, but one common reason for the loss of a foster family is due to attrition by adoption. Another need is for more trained and skilled foster parents to meet the ever changing and challenging needs that foster children are presenting. Focus group participants also noted the need for more foster parents for minority children and severely mentally ill children. Besides the need to recruit highly skilled foster parents, there is a need to recruit, train and license adoptive parents for older children. Focus group participants also noted that there is a need for post-adoptive resources for those families who need extra support and skill building. One focus group member pointed out that this is also related to the previously mentioned need for attachment and trauma-informed services.

E. PRACTICE – STRENGTHS

One of the greatest strengths discussed in focus groups was the dedicated, knowledgeable and competent staff at the La Crosse County Department of Human Services/Family and Children's Section (FCS). Community partners felt that the staff members of the Department of Human Services were invested in improving outcomes for children and

families. Several focus groups spoke of the agency's willingness to seek input from community partners. For example, it was reported by focus group members that there are two meetings held during the school year for agency personnel and educational personnel to interact and share information, one held in the fall and one held in the spring. Focus group participants also shared that case workers are open to meeting with school personnel as needed during the school year.

One recent modification in the agency's child welfare practice is the concept of "teaming" or partnering on cases. Teaming/partnering gives a family the opportunity to work with more than one FCS case worker, which may result in better matching of personalities and working styles. This concept, as described under the Organizational section as a strength, is one that is being implemented on higher needs cases. Examples of cases that fit the criteria include those with numerous children involved, challenging familial problems or higher needs children. Teaming/partnering of cases allows case workers an opportunity to give a family the individualized attention they need. Several examples were given in focus groups of how teaming/partnering has been successful in helping families to achieve the results they desire. One participant said they believed that teaming/partnering had "turned the case around" for the better once the family connected with a case manager that they believed was a better fit. The only negative aspect of case teaming/partnering expressed by some focus group members was confusion about who was considered the lead case worker, and therefore who should be contacted about an issue.

FCS Supervisors promote coaching and mentoring amongst front line workers in an attempt to encourage problem solving from a collaborative approach. In addition to using teaming/partnering as a support system, front line workers are able to access their direct Supervisor or any other Supervisor in the office for support and guidance when needed. Weekly unit meetings are held in the FCS Ongoing units in which case workers have the opportunity to share difficult case scenarios and are given the opportunity to problem solve with a team of knowledgeable case managers.

La Crosse County Human Services embraces a "family centered" approach in case practice and wishes to keep moving in the direction of engaging families in case planning. The philosophy of empowering families in their own case development and planning is one that is embraced in La Crosse County. Biological parents are taking an increased role and voice in the selection of services and providers. An example was given in a focus group where biological parents have been asked to participate on a panel that is looking at the issue of service selection, and how to make it more "user friendly" for families. There is increased utilization of teams, which is resulting in enhanced communication and coordination amongst those systems and providers who serve children and families. Parents are being asked to participate in the development of their own teams by adding members they wish to assist and support them.

The agency has developed an internal process of transferring cases from the Initial Assessment unit to the Ongoing unit that is consistent with the "family centered" approach. Cases that are ready to move into the Ongoing section are presented by the

Initial Assessment worker on a weekly basis to the Ongoing workers. Ongoing case managers are then able to select the family that they think would best match with their skill level. This once again speaks to the importance of matching families needs with case manager strengths in order to build trusting relationships. One focus group member spoke of the “new generation of training” that has become visible in case practice, noting that if a parent trusts a social worker, then “things fall into place”.

F. PRACTICE – CHALLENGES

In the “Practice - Strengths” section, teaming as it relates to a “family centered” approach and coordination of services was described as a notable positive practice in La Crosse County. However, one issue that focus group members pointed out was that there is no formal teaming model used. This appears to have led to confusion amongst some focus group members, as it was said that there has been discussion around different models, but one has not been selected. One focus group member questioned the difference between holding a staffing with the agency and having a “team meeting”.

As mentioned in the “Resources” section above, there is a need for more foster parents in La Crosse County. One factor that may be contributing to this is the agency’s need to make better use of relative placements. While there is utilization of relatives for out of home placements in the county, it was noted that it would be beneficial to seek out relatives earlier in the life of case. Focus group members recognized that searching for relatives is a missed opportunity in agency practice and seek to address this issue.

There is a need in La Crosse County to help families build informal supports and include these supports as team members. One focus group member expressed that the agency is strong in building formal supports for parents and children, yet it is the informal supports that will be instrumental in helping families sustain positive changes once the formal supports are gone. Focus group members also expressed concern about sibling interactions in regards to those children who are not living with their brothers and sisters. It was felt by some focus group participants that sibling visitations are not always a priority and, are frequently informal arrangements that may not be upheld. One focus group member described a situation where sibling visitation could have been “stressed more” by the agency. Lastly, in regards to practice with family members, several focus group participants recognized that the role of biological fathers could be better explored and defined at case onset. One focus group member expressed concern that fathers are held to a higher standard than mothers in the child welfare system when it relates to family reunification.

One area of practice that was noted as needing refinement were cases subject to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Focus group members did not feel that all cases entering the system were being properly screened as per federal ICWA requirements. Some members felt confused about the proper protocol for ICWA and subsequent forms that are required to notify a tribe. Besides screening, focus group members expressed concern that proper and/or timely notification to a child’s respective tribe, as outlined in ICWA, is not being followed in every case. Once again, there are opportunities for

improvement in this area and focus group members have expressed a need for a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ho Chunk Nation and the Department of Human Services to clarify a protocol.

G. LEGAL – STRENGTHS

One of the greatest legal strengths identified was the skill level of the Corporation Counsel team and the relationship between La Crosse Department of Human Services and Corporation Counsel. Corporation Counsel attorneys were said to be knowledgeable, available, organized and an overall asset to the child welfare system. Of particular note was the positive relationship and productive teamwork that exists between Corporation Counsel and the Human Services agency. It was also noted that case workers were well prepared for court hearings and had good knowledge of the families with whom they work.

There are five judges who hear child welfare cases in La Crosse County. Three of these judges are new, having been elected in the last year. Focus group members felt that the judges were respectful and are working to build a positive relationship with Human Services. Focus groups identified two things as working well in La Crosse County: judges are making juvenile cases a priority on their calendars; and one judge is assigned to preside over the life of a case. Both of these are viewed as assets to families and children, as juvenile cases are heard more timely and the courts are able to develop a more accurate account of a case by following it through the system. Though it was said to be inconsistent amongst the five judges, focus groups members felt some judges were asking for interested parties input at hearings, thus giving a role and voice to parties in the case. Foster parents in particular were cited as a group who has not traditionally been asked for input at hearings, but it was noted that some judges are making efforts to include the information they have to share on record. Focus group members also cited the fact that Judicial Reviews are being held in court at a minimum of every six months as a strength. Many counties in Wisconsin hold subsequent Judicial Reviews in court once every twelve months, with an Administrative Panel hearing the case in the interim sixth month. Often times in La Crosse County, the Judges will order a hearing even more frequently than required in order to follow up on an issue. One focus group member viewed this as a strength because it “forces people to get together and talk” quickly.

The use of mediation services in La Crosse County was seen by focus group members as resulting in fewer Child in Need of Protective or Services (CHIPS) cases requiring a trial, fewer contested Termination of Parental Rights cases, and earlier development and delivery of service plans to families. Focus groups members felt that respondents were being appointed attorneys in CHIPS cases the majority of the time and that parents are “rarely” unrepresented in court hearings.

H. LEGAL – CHALLENGES

One of the most notable challenges mentioned by focus group members was the inconsistent practice of guardians ad litem (GAL’s). Information gathered suggested that

GAL's have varying levels of involvement with the children they as assigned to represent. It was reported that some GAL's visit the children and know them well, while others only make contact with a child right before court hearings. Many focus group members felt there is a lack of ongoing training and oversight for the GAL's, which is likely contributing to the inconsistent performance.

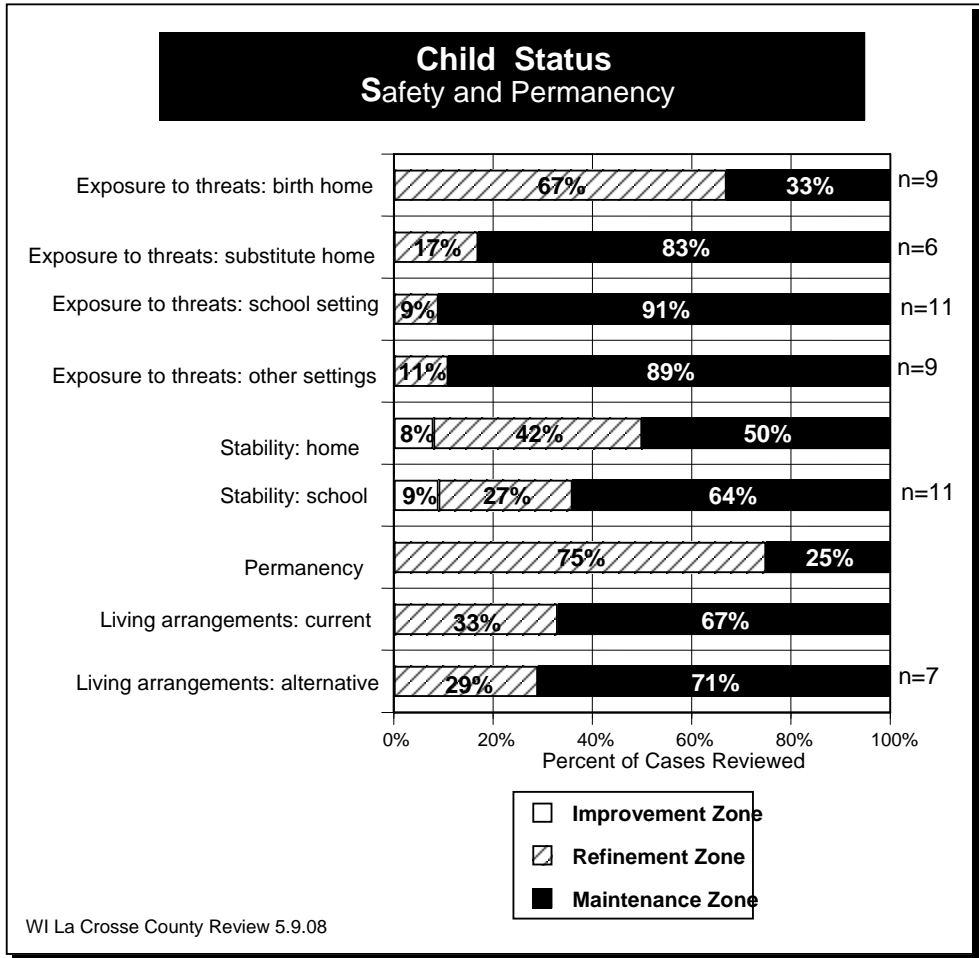
Focus group members cited an opportunity for improvement in court paperwork. Specifically, there can be a delay in receiving court orders and in the filing and distribution of court orders on the part of the Corporation Counsel. As mentioned above, respondents to a CHIPS petition are frequently assigned representation; however, there may be confusion around fees associated with this, as some persons are not aware there is a charge for legal services. Also mentioned in the Practice section, attention is needed in the legal area for notification to tribal contacts regarding children that are subject to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

IV. CHILD AND PARENT/CAREGIVER STATUS INDICATORS

The QSR uses eight indicators to assess a child's status and five indicators to assess parents and/or caregivers. The QSR Interpretative Guide (below) provides definitions to understand the scoring system. The results for the eight indicators are presented in aggregate and graphic format on the following pages and measure the child and parent/caregiver status in the 30 days prior to the review.

QSR Interpretative Guide for Child Status		
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Maintenance Zone: 5-6</p> <p>Status is favorable. Efforts should be made to maintain and build upon a positive situation.</p> </div>	<p>6 = OPTIMAL STATUS. The best or most favorable status presently attainable for this child in this area [taking age and ability into account]. Child is doing great! Confidence is high that long-term goals or expectations will be met in this area.</p> <p>5 = GOOD STATUS. Substantially and dependably positive status for the child in this area, with an ongoing positive pattern. This status level is consistent with attainment of long-term goals in this area. Status is "looking good" and likely to continue.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; width: fit-content; margin: auto;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Acceptable Range: 4-6</p> </div>
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Refinement Zone: 3-4</p> <p>Status is minimal or marginal, maybe unstable. Further efforts are necessary to refine the situation.</p> </div>	<p>4 = FAIR STATUS. Status is minimally or temporarily sufficient for the child to meet short-term objectives in this area. Status is minimally acceptable at this point in time, but may be short-term due to changing circumstance, requiring change soon.</p> <p>3 = MARGINAL STATUS. Status is marginal/mixed, not quite sufficient to meet the child's short-term objectives now in this area. Not quite enough for the child to be successful. Risks may be uncertain.</p>	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Improvement Zone: 1-2</p> <p>Status is now problematic or risky. Quick action should be taken to improve the situation.</p> </div>	<p>2 = POOR STATUS. Status has been and continues to be poor and unacceptable. The child seems to be "stuck" or "lost" and is not improving. Risks may be mild to moderate.</p> <p>1 = ADVERSE STATUS. Child status in this area is poor and getting worse. Risks of harm, restriction, exclusion, regression, and/or other adverse outcomes are substantial and increasing.</p>	<div style="background-color: black; color: white; padding: 10px; width: fit-content; margin: auto;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Unacceptable Range: 1-3</p> </div>

Note: n = (x) next to a bar in a graph signifies the number of cases meeting the specified criteria for the measurement. For some indicators, not all cases in the sample are scored.



Exposure to Imminent Threats of Harm: To what degree is the child free of abuse, neglect, and exploitation by others in his/her place of residence and other daily settings? Is the child free from injury caused by others in his/her daily home, school, and community settings? Do parents and caregivers provide the attention, actions, and supports necessary to protect the child from known threats of harm in the home?

Comments: This indicator examines the child’s exposure to factors that may put him or her at risk of maltreatment. It considers a variety of settings including the birth home, substitute home, school and any other setting where the child may spend time. Exposure to threats of harm increases for the children while in their birth homes: thirty-three percent of cases scored in the maintenance zone while sixty-seven percent scored in the refinement zone. The remaining settings (substitute home, school and other) all scored highly in the maintenance zone, eighty-three percent, ninety-one percent and eighty-nine percent respectively. In one case that was reviewed, there were unknowns about the

mother's home and other factors that contributed to the opinion that the child may be at risk. The reviewer wrote, "Without knowing more about Mother's living arrangement it is difficult to know who is coming in and out of the home and what threats these people may bring with them...it appears she does not understand how her decision to leave her children alone for an extended period of time left them at risk of harm." Another case demonstrates the factors that contributed to low threats of harm in the foster home: "For the most part the focus child is safe. The foster home provides a safe environment for her, where she can grow physically and emotionally, and where her basic needs are met."

Stability: To what degree are the child's daily living, learning, and work arrangements stable and free from risk of disruption? Are the child's daily settings, routines, and relationships consistent? Are known risks being managed to achieve stability and reduce the probability of future disruption?

Comments: When evaluating a child's stability, reviewers look at the number of disruptions or unplanned moves that the child has had in the past twelve months and also make a prediction as to the likelihood that the child will experience any life disruptions in the next six months. This indicator recognizes that while change is a natural part of life, movements for the child (due to safety or caregiving problems in the home) are often highly disruptive, stressful and affect many facets of the child's life. Of the twelve cases, fifty percent scored in the maintenance zone for stability in the home, while forty-two percent scored in the refinement zone and eight percent scored in the improvement zone. In regards to stability in the school setting, sixty-four percent scored in the maintenance zone, twenty-seven percent scored in the refinement zone and nine percent scored in the improvement zone.

One case that rated in the maintenance zone for school stability highlights how careful planning was used to minimize the disruptions and anxiety for a move to high school: "The focus child...will be transitioning to the high school CD program next school year. There has been much planning to assure that the transition will go smoothly. Her new teaching aides will be spending time with her this summer so that everyone will be more comfortable with one another when school starts."

Another case illustrates how both past disruptions and anticipated future disruptions can affect scoring: "Todd has had eight different placements, which include foster home placements and hospitalizations, over the past seven months. Several more transitions are anticipated after this assessment period. The team anticipates possible placement in a group home setting, then a treatment foster home setting and then hoping for reunification with his mother. Along with these moves in placement, it may be necessary to move school settings as well." This case scored in the improvement zone for home and school stability.

Permanency: Is the child/youth living with parents or out-of-home caregivers that the child, parents or out-of-home caregivers, and other stakeholders believe will sustain until the child reaches adulthood and continue onward to provide family connections and supports? If not, to what degree are permanency efforts presently

increasing the likelihood that the child/youth soon will be enveloped in enduring relationships that provide a sense of family, stability, and belonging?

Comments: The permanency indicator is rated both for children in out of home care and for children who live in their biological home. Evidence of permanency includes resolution of guardianship, adequate provision of necessary supports for the out of home caregiver, and the achievement of stability in the child's home and school settings. Thus, safety, stability and adequate caregiver functioning often correlate with high scores of permanency for a child. Twenty-five percent of the twelve cases reviewed scored in the maintenance zone; while seventy-five percent scored in the refinement zone.

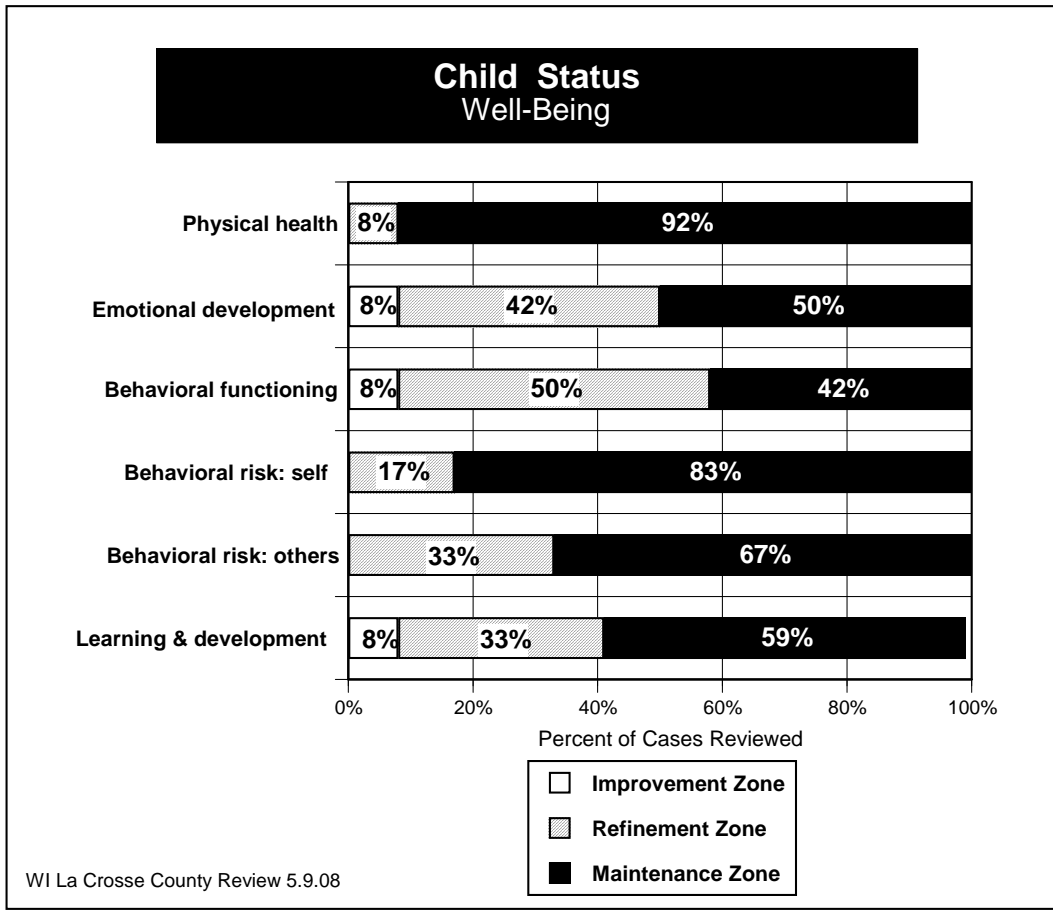
In one case where the goal was reunification with the mother, the permanency indicator scored in the low refinement zone. Not only was stability a concern, but the parent scored as needing improvement in the area of informal supports and needing refinement in regards to safety and parenting capacities. Another case again illustrates how both past and anticipated future disruptions affect permanency scores. "The focus child has had a stable and permanent placement since case opening. He has had no disruptions at home or with school in the past 12 months, and he has established a positive relationship with his father. While the focus child is in a parental home there is a possibility of future disruption if a family court decides that both parents will share placement and custody of the focus child."

Living Arrangement: To what degree is the child in the most appropriate/least restrictive living arrangement, consistent with needs for family relationships, social connections, age, ability, special needs, and positive peer group affiliation? If the child is in temporary out-of-home care, does the living arrangement meet the child's needs to be connected to his or her language and culture, community, faith, extended family, tribe, social activities, and peer group?

Comments: This indicator applies to the present living arrangement of the focus child and to any other home setting where the child may be staying. Of the twelve cases reviewed, sixty-seven percent scored in the maintenance zone, while thirty-three percent scored in the refinement zone. For alternative living arrangements, only seven cases were scored; seventy-one percent of these cases scored in the maintenance zone and twenty-nine percent scored in the improvement zone.

Generally, children are in fairly good living arrangements. None of the cases reviewed scored below the high refinement zone for both current or alternative living arrangements. In one case, the following descriptions were provided in regards to the living arrangement, "Several team members (felt) that Father is able to provide the structure and discipline Samson needs while Mother focuses on Samson's emotional needs and is able to recognize his behavioral 'triggers.'" Another case had good scores for the living arrangements at the foster home. "The living arrangements at the foster home meet the focus child's needs very adequately. The foster parents provided respite care for the focus child in the past, so they were familiar to the child upon

placement....focus child appears to have adjusted well to the foster home....(and) has developed bonds with the foster parents and other children in the home.”



Physical Health: To what degree is the child achieving and maintaining his/her optimum health status? If the child has a serious or chronic physical illness, is the child achieving his/her best attainable health status given the disease diagnosis and prognosis?

Comments: Consistent with QSR scores in other counties in Wisconsin and with scores in the 2003 Federal Child and Family Service Review, children in the La Crosse County sample were in good health or health issues were being appropriately addressed when needed.

Emotional Development: To what degree is the child presenting age-appropriate emotional development, adjustment, appropriate coping skills, and self-control?

Comments: This indicator addresses the child’s ability to appropriately express feelings, cope with difficult circumstances, connect with others and form relationships, and regulate their emotions. Fifty percent of the twelve cases reviewed in La Crosse County

scored within in the maintenance zone; forty-two percent scored in the refinement zone and eight percent scored in the improvement zone. Due to the circumstances that often result in children being open to child welfare services—abuse, neglect, poverty—and the additional traumatic experience of being removed from their home, children often struggle in the area of emotional development. Frequently a correlation is seen between children with unresolved trauma issues and lowers scores in on this indicator.

The following case illustrates this correlation: “(The focus child) has experienced physical and emotional trauma via the relationship with her father and step-mother. Family therapy had been attempted to resolve their relationship issues... (the focus child) may need additional counseling to resolve the hurt feelings she has toward her father....and unresolved anger.....” The focus child in another case reviewed had a history of abuse, neglect and disruptions and his emotional development was rated as needing some attention: “He is described by providers as having a poor self image, flat affect, significant temper tantrums, and oppositional and aggressive behaviors. He has described himself as “stupid” to teachers and other providers.”

Behavioral Functioning: To what degree is the child achieving and maintaining an adequate level of behavioral functioning in daily settings, activities, and social groups?

Comments: The scores for this indicator are similar to the scores in the emotional development indicator. Forty-two percent of the cases scored in the maintenance zone, fifty percent scored in the refinement zone and eight percent scored in the improvement zone. Parenting children with moderate to severe limitations in behavioral functioning can be quite challenging and even more challenging for parents with limited resources and support. Nonetheless, with the right supports and resources in combination with a strong cohesive team, these issues can be successfully addressed. One case reviewed highlights this kind of success: “Considering the focus child’s behavior at the beginning of this case, she has really shown improvement. Instead of running away, skipping school, being defiant, and experimenting with chemicals, this child is now excelling at school, posing few behavioral difficulties, and displaying behaviors that are typical for a high school girl.”

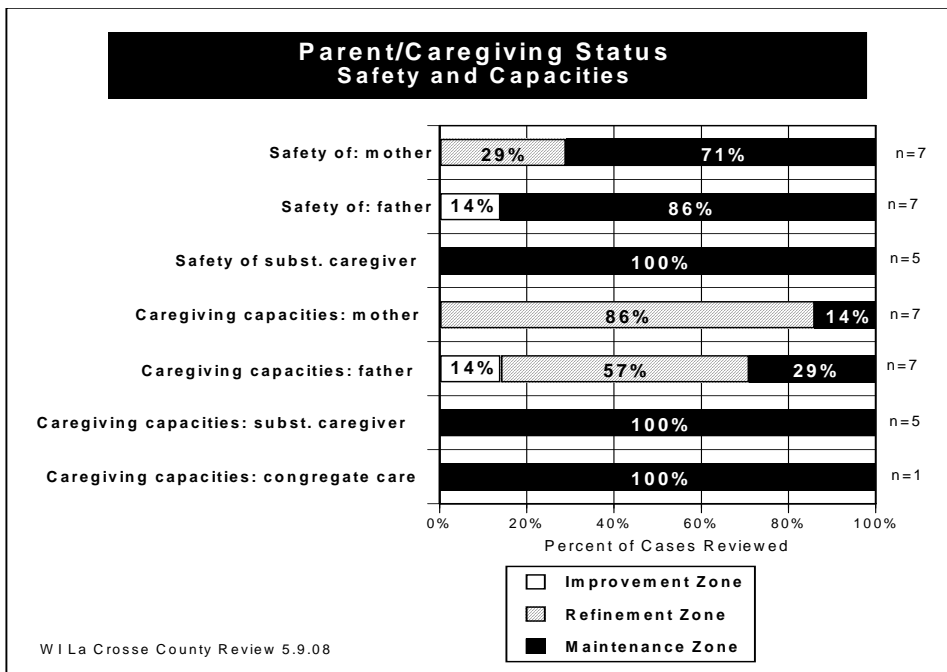
Behavioral Risk: To what degree is the child/youth consistently avoiding self-endangerment situations and refraining from using behaviors that may put him/herself or others at risk of harm?

Comments: Most of the children involved in the review are refraining from activities and behaviors that result in self-harm; however, there was a somewhat greater risk when looking at harm to others. As noted in one case story, “(The focus child) has demonstrated severe behavior outbursts to the point of physically attacking others. For example, he attacked an in-home service provider... (and) has needed to be restrained and transported to seclusion.”

Early Learning & Development (Under Age 5): To what degree is the young child’s developmental status commensurate with his/her age and developmental capacities? Is the child’s developmental status in key domains consistent with age-appropriate expectations?

Learning and Development (Age 5 and Older): Is the child (according to age and ability): 1) regularly attending school; 2) in a grade level consistent with age; 3) actively engaged in instructional activities; 4) reading at grade level or Individual Educational Plan (IEP) expectation; and 5) meeting requirements for annual promotion and course completion leading to a high school diploma or equivalent?

Comments: This indicator focuses on the child’s current learning and academic status relative to access to, participation in, and fulfillment of basic educational requirements for entry into the next school or vocational program. Fifty-nine percent of the children who participated in the La Crosse County review scored in the maintenance zone; thirty three percent scored in the refinement zone and eight percent scored in the improvement zone.



Safety of the Parent/Caregiver: Is the parent/caregiver in the child’s household safe from manageable risk of harm at home? Is the parent/caregiver free from intimidations and reasonable fears of domestic violence in the home?

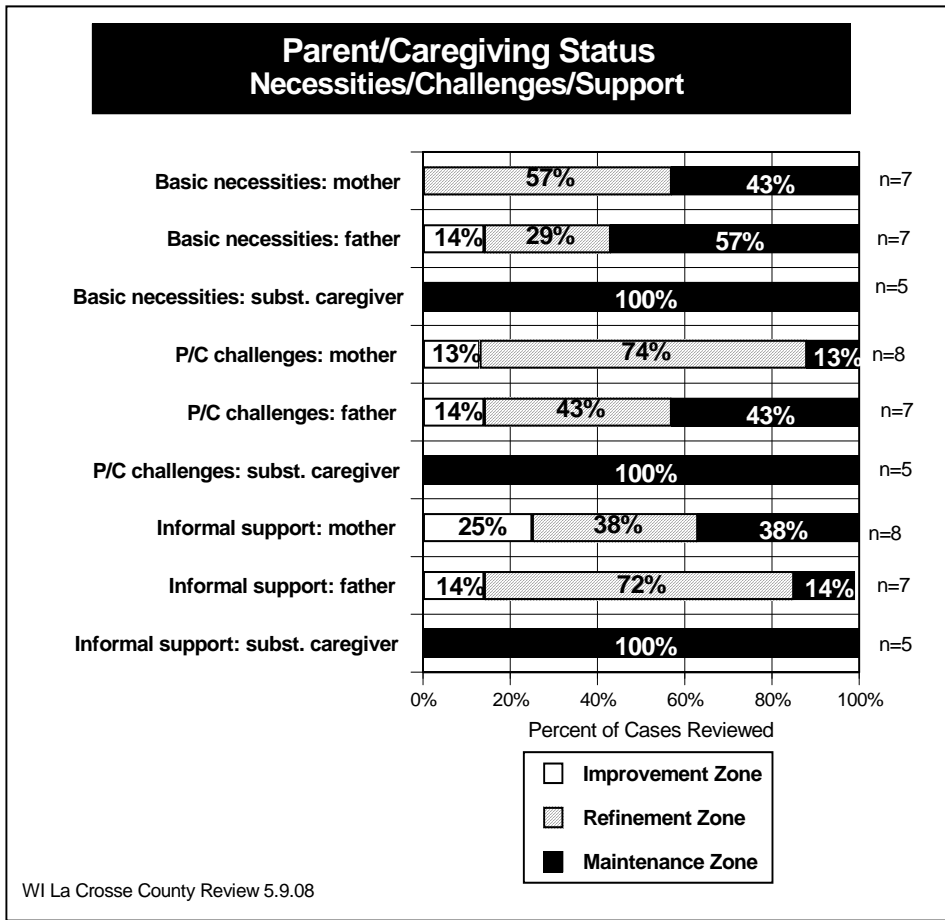
Comments: The safety indicator looks at the parent or caregiver’s exposure to risk of harm in their home and in their community. This may include concerns of domestic violence or lifestyle choices that may increase the risk of being harmed, such as buying or selling drugs. Seven mothers were rated for this measure; five scored in the maintenance

zone, while the remaining two scored in the high refinement zone. In one case that scored in the refinement zone little was known about the mother's boyfriend, who has a criminal background, and not enough information was available to confidently determine the situation safe. The mother of the other case that scored in the refinement zone had struggled with suicide attempts and depression. Seventy five percent of the four fathers that were rated scored in the maintenance zone, with one scoring in the improvement zone and all substitute caregivers were viewed as safe in their homes. The father that scored in the improvement zone has a long history of depression and suicide attempts. "(The father) has a mental illness of depression and it is reported that he has had five known suicide attempts."

Caregiving Capacities (Home Settings): To what degree does the parent/caregiver demonstrate adequate caregiving capacities on a reliable daily basis commensurate with that required to provide the child(ren) with appropriate nurturance, guidance, protection, care, and supervision? If the child(ren) have special medical, emotional, behavioral, and/or developmental needs, does the caregiver have and use any special knowledge, skills, and supports that may be required to meet the needs of the child(ren)?

Caregiving Capacities (Congregate Settings): To what degree are the child's/youth's primary caregivers in the group home or facility supporting the education, development, and independence of the child/youth adequately on a consistent daily basis (as appropriate to age and need)?

Comments: There were seven mothers and seven fathers rated for this indicator. Although there were a higher percentage of fathers who scored in the maintenance zone than mothers, when these scores are applied to the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) standards mothers actually fared slightly better: seventy-one percent scoring in the acceptable range as opposed to fifty-seven percent of fathers scoring in the acceptable range. All substitute care providers who were rated scored in the maintenance zone. This is such an important status indicator for parents and caregivers as it is often a demonstration of the capacity to care for and keep children safe and contributes to decisions around safe case closure. In one case that was reviewed, the mother was working at examining her parenting beliefs, safety and appropriate care. "(The mother) has explored the demands having all the children together create and that she may not be able to do everything for all her children. For example, mother has agreed to have the youngest two children placed with their biological fathers at this time. The team took mother through the safety concerns and needs for each of her children during a team meeting. Mother was able to identify differences in each child's safety needs. While there is some concern that she has a tendency to delegate her parental duties to the older children, she has been working with a parent support worker to begin learning about structure and limits."



Basic Necessities: To what degree are the family’s earned income and/or economic supports adequate to cover the family’s basic living requirements (i.e., shelter, food, clothing, transportation, health care/medicine, childcare)? Is the parent/caregiver accessing, receiving, and adequately managing the economic supports to which he/she is entitled? Does the parent/caregiver have economic security and skills sufficient for meeting the family’s basic needs and maintaining a stable living arrangement for the children? Does the current living arrangement provide the family with adequate space and living conditions?

Comments: This indicator considers whether the income and housing arrangements are adequately meeting children’s basic housing, nutrition and health care needs. In La Crosse County it appears that mother’s and father’s basic necessities are minimally adequate. There was one father who scored in the improvement zone and his situation was interesting in that he was recently released from jail and making efforts to turn his life around and earn placement of his child. Although he has historically struggled, he is making steady progress. The substitute care providers all scored in the maintenance zone for basic necessities.

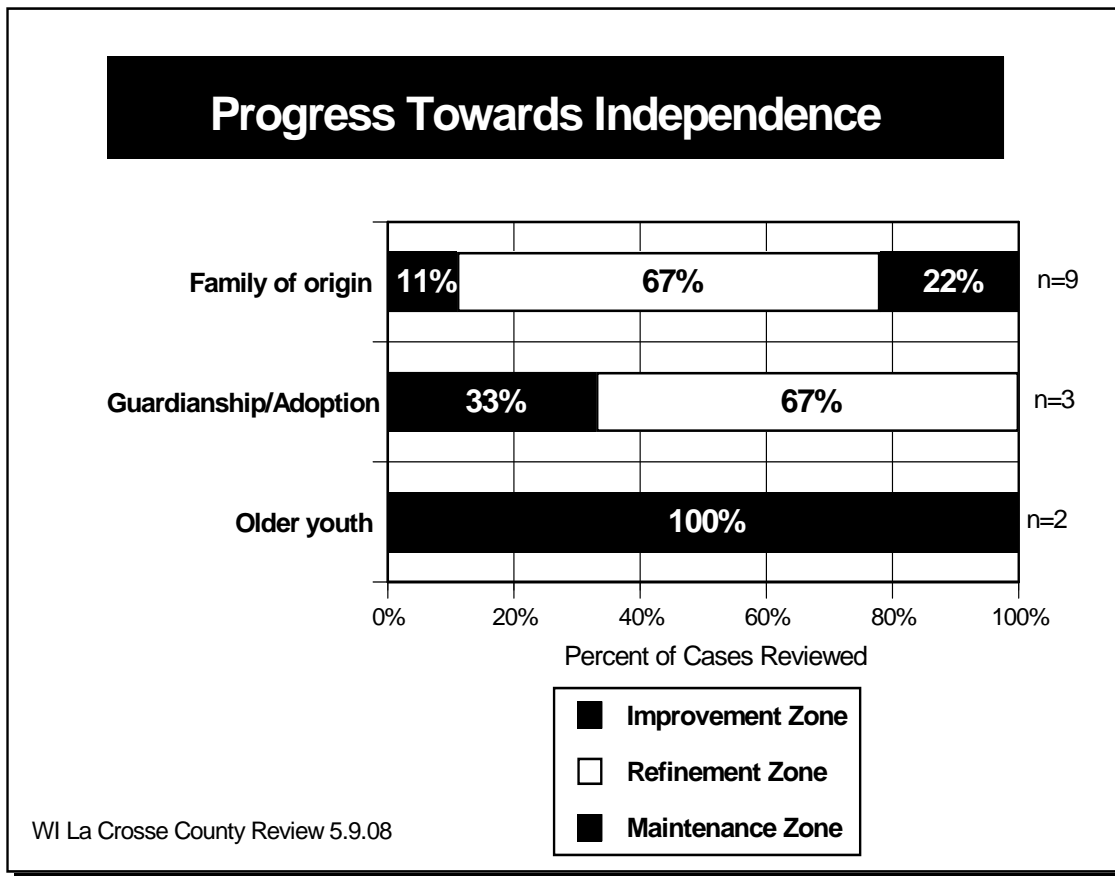
Special Parenting/Caregiving Challenges: To what degree do parents/caregivers, with whom the child is currently residing or has a goal of reunification, present or experience a pattern of significant, ongoing challenges that limit or adversely affect the parent/caregiver’s capacity to function successfully as an adequate caregiver for this child? Does the family have any special life challenges that interfere with or prevent them from living together safely and functioning successfully?

Comments: This indicator considers the various factors that could forestall optimal parenting and management of the home. When parents are challenged by mental health, alcohol or other drug use or destructive relationships they often struggle to keep their children safe. There are often strong correlations noted between caregiving challenges and caregiving capacities. Additionally, it is often caregiver challenges that inform case plans and referrals; lack of progress around parenting challenges often prevents safe case closure. The case stories demonstrate a diverse range of challenges that many parents were working very hard at overcoming. “(The mother) was removed for a time from her mother’s care and placed with an aunt. There is multigenerational drug abuse in her family of origin... the mother had been jailed for the past two months but on the review day she was released from jail and began an in-patient program to treat drug abuse.” In another story, the mother is taking the necessary steps to manage the challenges in her life: “The mother has had much adversity in her life. She comes from a neglectful and alcoholic home. She has maintained the same apartment for the past year. Currently she has a job that she likes, which is cleaning at an area motel. She has no AODA issues and is compliant with her medication for depression.”

Informal Support System: To what degree is the family engaged with an informal support system that assists them with essential caregiving responsibilities? Do families having special needs children, recovery/relapse prevention plans, and/or family safety plans have adequate levels of informal support provided by family, friends, neighbors, or other supporters involved who will help them manage adequately on an enduring basis? When a family has a child with special needs (physical, developmental, emotional, behavioral), do parents/caregivers have opportunities to exchange experiences, strategies, and successes with parents/caregivers of similar circumstances?

Comments: This caregiver status indicator looks at the quality, quantity and range of informal supports that surround caregivers and their families. This indicator underscores the importance of establishing trusting, dependable, healthy relationships that families can turn to for help, human connection and support. Oftentimes this can be a challenge for the families we serve. Some families have moved away from their own families to begin a new life, other families choose to isolate themselves to stay away from ‘trouble’ and other families are not sure how to make healthy choices and connections. Mothers in the La Crosse County sample and especially fathers could benefit from more quality supports; thirty eight percent of mothers rated in the maintenance zone, while fourteen percent of fathers were in the maintenance zone. Substitute caregivers were all rated in the maintenance zone.

V. PROGRESS INDICATORS



Progress to Independence (Family of Origin): To what degree is the family making progress toward their permanency goal of maintaining the child safely at home and/or successful reunification? As necessary to reunify/preserve the family, to what degree have: 1) protective provisions necessary for keeping children safe been established and maintained within the home; 2) necessary parent/caregiver behavior changes been made, demonstrated, and sustained; and 3) necessary and sustainable conditions and supports been established within the home and family situation (e.g., housing, childcare, income, health care)?

Comments: This progress indicator addresses whether families are making sufficient progress to move towards safe case closure and independence from the agency. Results of the review indicate that progress for families attempting to reach independence from the agency could use some attention as twenty-two percent of cases reviewed fell in the maintenance zone while sixty-seven percent fell in the refinement zone. This indicator considers a number of areas addressed in the child/caregiver status in answering the question: can we safely close this case with confidence? Does the family has the knowledge, skills and support to function in a healthy and successful manner independent from the agency? In one case that was reviewed information was lacking around the

child's mental health needs which in turn affected overall progress: "The assessment of the focus child's needs has not been completed; therefore, the team has not been able to create a clear plan in terms of needed behavior changes and skills that mother should acquire to achieve the goal of reunification with the focus child." In another case that was reviewed 'progress toward independence rated very high because the concerns that initiated case opening were addressed: "(The indicator) rated a 6, in the maintenance zone, as reunification was achieved ahead of the goal date. There were no safety concerns with Father, he made significant progress regarding his behavioral changes and the fundamental needs of (the focus child) were addressed."

Progress to Permanency (Guardianship/Adoption): To what degree is the child living in an environment that supports achievement of permanency through guardianship or adoption? Has the permanent family been identified? To what extent has this child and family: 1) accepted new members and formed realistic expectations; 2) moved through family formation and adaptation stages with necessary adjustments made, demonstrated, and sustained; 3) established sustainable conditions and supports within the home and family situation (e.g., childcare, health care, respite, crisis support, in-home assistance) necessary to meet any special care requirements that the adoptive child presents in the home and family situation?

Comments: Of the three cases that were scored for this indicator two fell in the low refinement zone and one fell in the improvement zone indicating an opportunity for improvement. The "Pathway to Permanency" review that the State of Wisconsin initiated in 2008 looks at cases from Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) to adoption and may shed some additional light on areas that could be improved in order to move these children towards permanency. In one case that was rated in this area, they were unsuccessful in locating any relatives for placement and were planning to remove the goal of guardianship/adoption from the record. In another case, plans for adoption were progressing along when the adoptive family backed out due to a change in their family structure. In another case, the plan for adoption seemed nebulous and in its infancy.

Progress to Independence (Older Youth): To what degree has the youth been making progress toward living safely and functioning successfully independent of agency services over the past six months? Is the youth demonstrating a developing ability to live safely and function successfully without outside supervision, assuming that any necessary supports continue after reaching the age of majority? Is the youth developing long-term connections that will support him/her into adulthood?

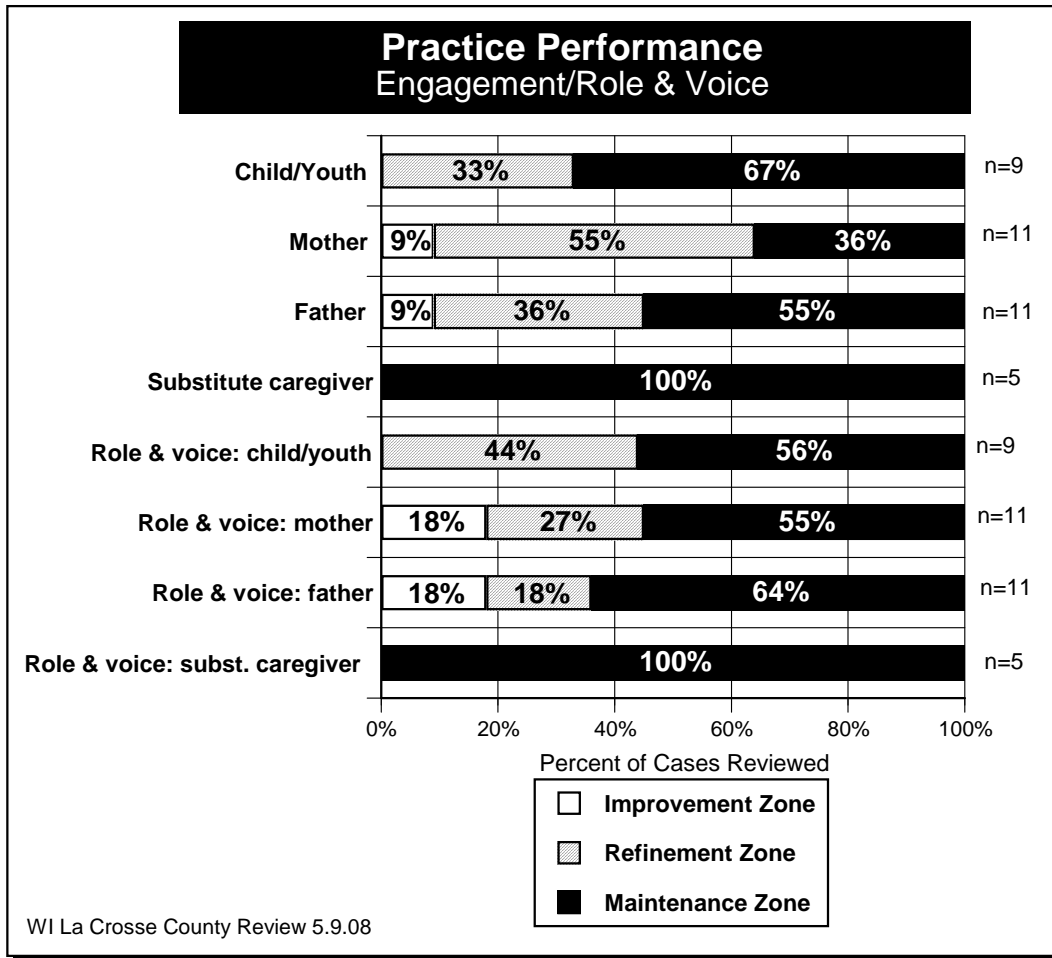
Comments: There were two cases scored for this indicator; both scored in the maintenance zone. Excellent resources in the community seem to contribute to success in this area, namely, the Independent Living Skills program. In addition, the cases that scored well in this area seemed to have a strong team working towards the same goal. "(The focus child) is also very interested in the transitional living program through the independent living program and it is likely she will qualify when the time comes to plan for this transition. Everyone involved in this case seems to have the same long-term view

for (the focus child's) future and understands the current permanency timelines. Due to the team's planning....the overall progress to permanency scored in the maintenance zone."

VI. THE ELEMENTS OF CASE PRACTICE (THE MICRO VIEW)

The Quality Service Review (QSR) case practice model contains evidence-based elements of best practice. The elements are found in the QSR protocol and were applied in rating the twelve cases that were reviewed. There is an ample body of research that documents the efficacy and contribution in helping families develop, pursue, and complete successful strategies of change. The scores on practice performance are presented to point out strengths in case practice that should be maintained, as well as opportunities where the agency can focus efforts in improving outcomes for children and families served.

QSR Interpretative Guide for Practice Indicator Ratings		
<p>Maintenance Zone: 5-6</p> <p>Performance is effective. Efforts should be made to maintain and build upon a positive practice situation.</p>	<p>6 = OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE. <u>Excellent, consistent, effective practice</u> for this person in this function area. This level of performance is indicative of <u>exemplary practice and results</u> for the person. [6 month sustained pattern]</p> <p>5 = GOOD PERFORMANCE. At this level, the system function is <u>working dependably</u> for this person, under changing conditions and over time. Effectiveness level is <u>consistent with meeting long-term needs and goals</u> for the person. [3 month sustained pattern]</p>	<p>Acceptable Range: 4-6</p>
<p>Refinement Zone: 3-4</p> <p>Performance is minimal or marginal and maybe changing. Further efforts are necessary to refine the practice situation.</p>	<p>4 = FAIR PERFORMANCE. This level of performance is <u>minimally or temporarily sufficient to meet short-term need or objectives</u>. Performance may be time-limited, somewhat variable, or require adjustment soon due to changing circumstances. [1 month continuing pattern. Some refinement is indicated]</p> <p>3 = MARGINAL PERFORMANCE. Practice at this level may be <u>under-powered, inconsistent or not well-matched to need</u>. Performance is <u>insufficient for the person to meet short-term needs or objectives</u>. [With refinement, this could become acceptable in the near future.]</p>	
<p>Improvement Zone: 1-2</p> <p>Performance is inadequate. Quick action should be taken to improve practice now.</p>	<p>2 = POOR PERFORMANCE. Practice at this level is <u>fragmented, inconsistent, lacking necessary intensity, or off-target</u>. Elements of practice may be noted, but it is <u>incomplete/not operative on a consistent basis</u>.</p> <p>1 = ADVERSE PERFORMANCE. Practice may be <u>absent or not operative</u>. Performance may be <u>missing (not done)</u>. - OR - Practice strategies, if occurring in this area, may be <u>contra-indicated or may be performed inappropriately or harmfully</u>.</p>	<p>Unacceptable Range: 1-3</p>



ENGAGEMENT OF CHILD & FAMILY: Are those interveners involved with the family used engagement strategies, including special accommodations with any difficult-to-reach family members, to increase family engagement and participation in the service process? Are interveners building a trust-based working relationship with the child, family, and/or others to support ongoing assessment, understanding, and service decisions? Are interveners relying on a mutually beneficial partnership with the child, family, and/or others that is sustaining their interest in and commitment to the change process?

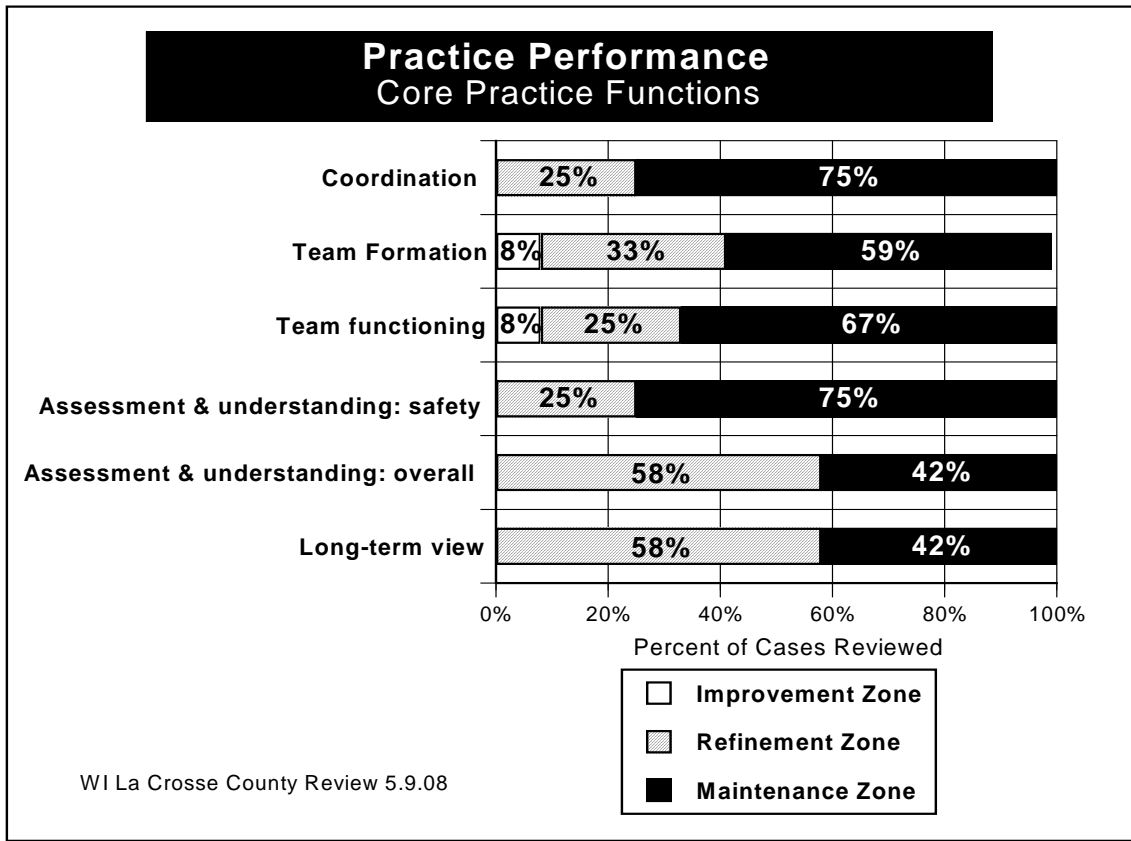
Comments: Engaging the child and the caregivers in a meaningful, trust-based relationship is a crucial step in case practice, as it is often the essential ingredient necessary to motivate families to take the risks needed in reaching independence from the agency. The focus child, mother, father and substitute caregiver are all rated for this indicator. In La Crosse County, engagement scores were quite good and somewhat different from what is typically seen across Wisconsin in that fathers had higher scores in engagement than mothers. The scores were as follows: Children scored sixty-seven percent in the maintenance zone; mothers scored thirty-six percent in the maintenance zone; fathers scored fifty-five percent in the maintenance zone; and substitute caregivers scored one hundred percent in the maintenance zone. It should be noted that when using

Federal guidelines mothers scored seventy-three percent as 'acceptable' indicating that many of the mothers scored in the high refinement zone for the La Crosse QSR.

There are many factors that contribute to successful engagement. In one case, reviewers noted how providers needed to work slowly with the mother to build up her trust. "The county agency has encouraged the mother to utilize local services and to break away from the domestic violence in her life. While the mother has not always trusted the county system, she has recently begun to disclose more information related to issues within the family." Another case demonstrated how the sensitive needs of families affect engagement strategies. "The agency social worker recognized that father is also not engaged with providers....his mental health diagnoses, which are Delusional Disorder NOS and Personality Disorder NOS, may be getting in the way of successfully engaging father." Overall, workers are successfully engaging their families and considering individual needs and differences in developing strategies to engage families. "The father mentioned that although there were certain areas the workers felt he needed to work on; he was given options and wasn't just told what to do. The reviewers believe he would have shut down at the beginning had they not engaged the father in this manner."

ROLE & VOICE IN DECISIONS: To what degree are the child's parents significant, ongoing participants (e.g. having a significant role, voice, influence) in decisions made about child/family change strategies, services, supports, and results? (Role and voice in recent meetings).

Comments: The QSR model teaches us that families are much more motivated to support and participate in plans or decisions that they have had a "role and voice" in creating. La Crosse County social workers are successfully giving the children and families they serve a role and voice in their planning and decision making. Children scored fifty-six percent in the maintenance zone; mothers scored fifty-five percent in the maintenance zone; fathers scored sixty-four percent in the maintenance zone; and substitute care providers all scored in the maintenance zone. One case reviewed emphasizes how the entire team had a role and voice in case planning: "Everyone on the team, including (the focus child), feels they have a role and voice in decision-making and have a shared long-term view for (the focus child's) future and permanence."



COORDINATION: To what degree are there: A single point of coordination and leadership necessary for convening and facilitating effective family change planning and service decision processes for this child and family? Effective coordination, integration, and continuity in the assessment, planning, organization, and provision of services to this child and family?

Comments: Although concerns regarding coordination were mentioned in the focus groups as a result of teaming/pairing of cases, this was not reflected in the individual case reviews. Coordination rated quite high with nine of the twelve cases scoring in the maintenance zone and the remaining three scoring in the high refinement zone. Overall, information was communicated and services were managed very effectively.

TEAM FORMATION: To what degree: (1) Have the people who provide support and services for this child and family formed a working team that meets, talks, and plans together? (2) Does the team have the skills, family knowledge, and abilities necessary to organize effective services a child and family of this complexity and cultural background?

TEAM FUNCTIONING: To what degree: (1) Do members of the family team collectively function as a unified team in planning services and evaluating results? (2) Do actions of the family team reflect a coherent pattern of effective teamwork and collaborative problem solving that benefits the child and family?

Comments: Teaming is a core practice value of the QSR and viewed as essential to successful case practice and outcomes. Many areas of practice are enhanced by good team formation and functioning including engagement, role and voice, tracking and adjustment, and coordination. Seven cases scored in the maintenance zone for both team formation and functioning, and one case scored in the maintenance zone for team functioning but in the high refinement zone for team formation. An example of good teaming affecting other areas of practice follows: “Good coordination was further maintained by regularly scheduled and well attended team meetings. The parents are always invited, as are any support persons they would like present... (the team) regularly discussed progress and needs and made changes accordingly.” In another case, good team formation and functioning is evident, but also, it is clear that the workers are using a “family centered approach. “ “The workers worked well at keeping the team and services organized, but didn’t just run things....(they) allowed the family and other members of the team to take more leading roles at times as well.” In yet another case that scored high in teaming, flexibility and creative approaches were used to best fit the family’s needs. “The services provided.....show a strong team effort. Since the focus child had been receiving Medicaid waiver services, the special needs worker had a longer history with the focus child and mother than the ongoing worker. La Crosse County has combined special needs workers with the CPS ongoing unit and it serves everyone well. Moreover, there is a better understanding on everyone’s part as to the provision of services.”

ASSESSMENT & UNDERSTANDING - SAFETY: To what degree: Is there a shared big picture understanding of the child and family’s strengths, needs, risks, and diminished parent/caregiver protective capacities that must change to assure child safety? Are these understandings reflected in the process used for helping the family achieve a safe home (via protective provisions in the home, demonstrated parent/caregiver protective capacities, and sustainable family supports)?

Comments: This indicator looks at how well safety is assessed and understood by providers and in turn how this is communicated to caregivers so that they are able to recognize and respond to safety threats. This is considered an ongoing process throughout the life of the case and safety plans should reflect changes and progress, and inform safe case closure. Seventy-five percent of the cases reviewed in La Crosse County scored in the maintenance zone; the remaining cases scored in the high refinement zone. Safety assessment and understanding of safety were clearly strengths within this case: “The child is physically safe. There is a good understanding of the safety factors that affect the focus child when the parents are using drugs...Also, the utilization of the focus child’s grandfather to supervise visitation with her father was successful not only for maintaining frequent and meaningful visitation but also to assist the grandfather in gaining an understanding of the safety issues that the child’s father presents when he’s using.”

ASSESSMENT & UNDERSTANDING - OVERALL: To what degree: Is there a shared big picture understanding of the child and family's strengths, needs, risks, and underlying issues that must change for the child and family of origin or

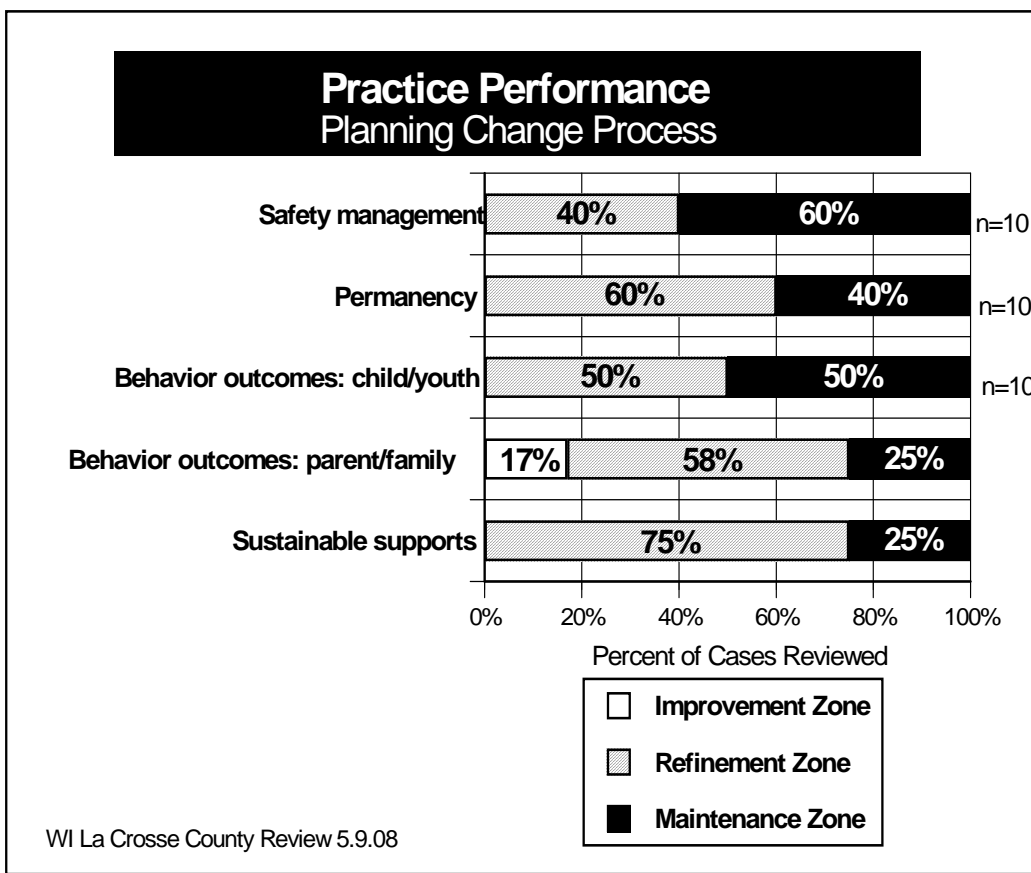
adoptive family to live independent of agency supervision? Are these understandings reflected in the family change process used for helping the family achieve permanency and well-being (via demonstrated parental behavior changes, sustainable family supports, and concurrent alternatives pursued for achieving permanency with another family, if necessary)?

Comments: This indicator looks at the assessment techniques used to determine the strengths, needs, risks, underlying issues, interests and future goals of the child and family. When a good overall assessment and understanding is missing, plans and services often only address behaviors and symptoms, but not the root of the behaviors. Good engagement naturally leads to a good overall understanding and assessment, which in turn leads to a better match of services and safety plans. Forty-two percent of the cases reviewed in La Crosse County scored in the maintenance zone; while fifty-eight percent of cases scored in the refinement zone. In one case reviewed, the team made encompassing efforts to better understand the underlying issues in the case. “The team was able to come to a shared understanding of the family’s strengths and needs. They saw how the father’s anger was a key factor in the case...Also, by including the grandparents in the meetings from the start, the team was able to get a clear understanding of the type of parenting exposed to and modeled to the father.” In another case reviewed, information and appropriate assessments were lacking that may have illuminated some of the focus child’s behavioral problems. “(The focus child’s) history of abuse, neglect and disruptions, qualifies him as ‘trauma exposed’, but no formal assessment has been completed to determine if this exposure has resulted in trauma-related symptoms.”

LONG-TERM VIEW FOR SAFE CASE CLOSURE: To what degree are there defined, understood, and agreed-upon conditions for Safe Case Closure that specify what: Protective provisions must be present in the home to keep children and parents safe? Permanency issues must be resolved and outcomes attained? Behavioral patterns must be demonstrated and sustained in the home by the parent? Sustainable conditions and supports must be present in the home and family situation to preserve the family, reunify the family, support the adoptive family or youth while transitioning to independent living so that external supervision may be safely concluded with the family or youth being independent of the system?

Comments: This indicator, although abstract, is pivotal in motivating both family members and providers to engage in the change process and in developing the concrete steps and plans necessary to reach the final goal. This indicator asks, “Where do we want to go?” “How will we know when we are done?” “What steps should be taken to reach the goal?” There is a visual element involved, as one is encouraged to imagine or “visualize” an end result when initiating the change process. In the La Crosse County review, five cases scored in the maintenance zone; seven cases scored in the refinement zone. In many of the cases that were reviewed, there seemed to be a relation between the functioning of a cohesive team and good scores on Long Term View. In one case it was noted that, “One additional area of strength was the Long Term View which was

basically shared by all involved with the family.” However, in another case, “The team recognizes that a significant goal to achieve regarding case closure is for Mother and Father to ‘co-parent’; however, it is evident that each team member holds a different view of what that would look like.” This dynamic was seen in yet another case: “There is a lack of a long-term view for case closure stemming from differing opinions by team members.” Finally, one case story underscores the need for visualizing an end point. “Long term view for safe case closure was rated as needing refinement. The team is still gathering information regarding the focus child’s needs, as well as mother’s ability to meet those needs. At this point, there is not a clear sense of what ‘done’ looks like for this family. The lack of a clear and understood destination for this family has also affected the ability to plan a change process. In other words, without knowing the destination it is difficult to map out a route to get there.”



PLANNING A PROCESS FOR SAFETY MANAGEMENT: To what degree is a well-reasoned, ongoing process being used for controlling and managing impending danger threats to child safety while strategies and actions are developed and implemented for the family change process via enhancing parent/caregiver capacities that lead to: Attainment of protective conditions for safety in the home? Acquisition/demonstration of required parent behavior changes? Securing sustainable family supports?

Comments: Building on the assessment and understanding of safety, the QSR measures to what extent a coherent plan is not only devised, but also implemented to mitigate threats to safety. Ten of the twelve cases in the La Crosse County review were scored for this indicator, of those, sixty percent were in the maintenance zone and forty percent were in the refinement zone. The process of completing a safety assessment and then planning for safety management is aptly mapped out in the following case story: “The team, during a team meeting, did a good job at identifying each child’s needs and then having mother identify how each child’s needs in regards to safety differed as a function of age. This gave the team, as well as the mother, a good understanding of the safety threats present in this case.” Another case speaks to the balance involved in managing safety while working with parents. “The county agency’s knowledge and understanding of the safety issues in this case is very good. Solid measures have been taken to ensure for the safety of the focus child with her out of home placement, while continuing to educate the mother on resources and interventions as it relates to domestic violence.”

PLANNING A CHANGE PROCESS FOR PERMANENCY [For a child removed from his or her home]: To what degree is a well-reasoned planning process used to drive strategies and actions for the family change process that provides, as needed, for: Reunifying the child and parent, replacing the entering parent with another, or achieving independence for a youth? Searching for, findings, eliminating, and approving a relative or another replacement to be the permanent caregiver? Resolving any legal barriers to permanency? Supporting and evaluating the stability and success of the child and family in a potentially permanent home to ensure family sustainability as a condition for Safe Case Closure?

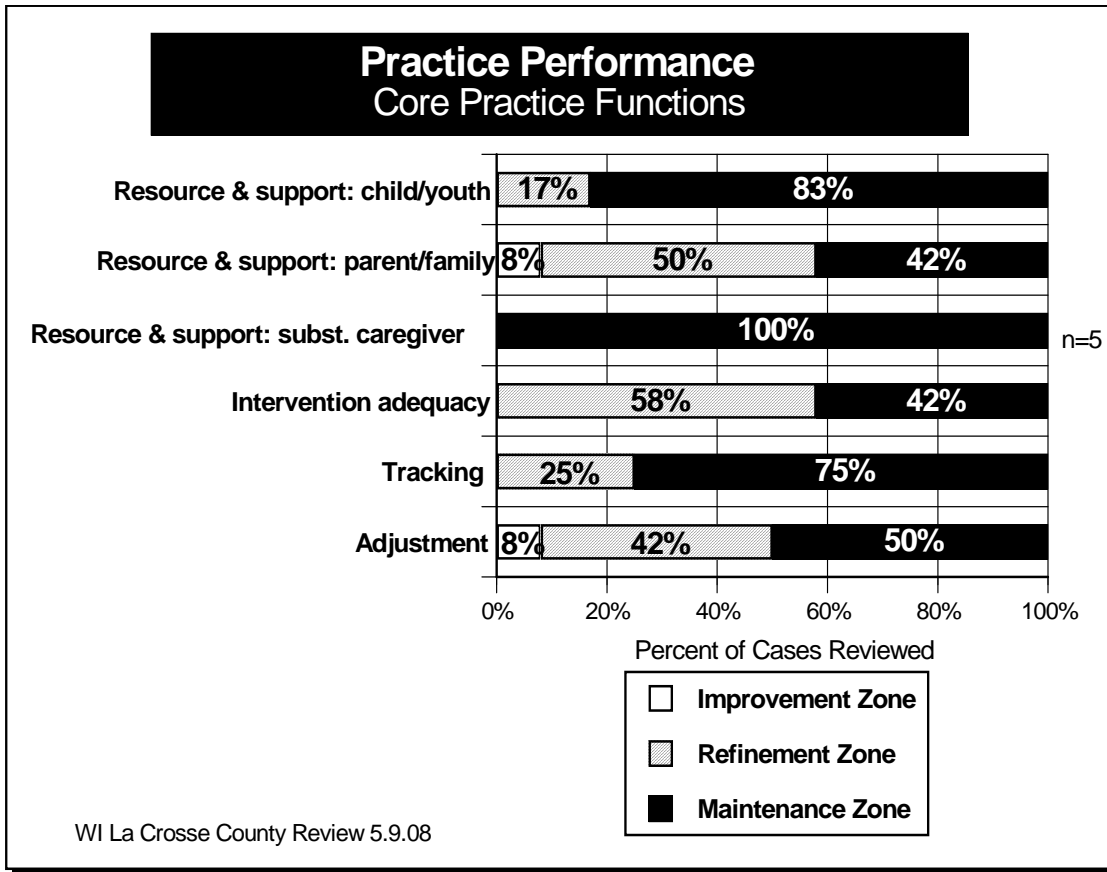
Comments: This indicator is strongly linked to the practice indicator “Long Term View for Safe Case Closure” and the permanency indicator under “Child Status.” Forty percent of the ten cases scored in this indicator fell in the maintenance zone and sixty percent were in the refinement zone. Excerpts from the following case story illustrate the connection between these practice indicators: “Everyone sees the permanency goal of long-term foster care as the appropriate choice in this situation; subsequently the long term view indicator rated highly in this case....everyone is future oriented with the focus child. They have considered the next step and the resources for eventual vocational involvement as an adult. There is much planning for her transition into the high school.”

PLANNING A CHANGE PROCESS FOR BEHAVIOR OUTCOMES: To what degree is a well-reasoned, ongoing planning process being used to drive strategies and actions for a behavior change process that provides, as needed, for: Acquisition and demonstration of knowledge and skills necessary for parenting? Reduction of behaviors and/or symptoms that interfere with protective and caregiving capacities? Demonstration that behavior changes are effective in parenting, protecting children, and maintaining stability of the home and family situation? Demonstration that behavior changes are sustainable over time and likely to continue following return and Safe Case Closure?

Comments: This indicator considers the planning that occurs to yield the desired child, parent and family behavior outcomes. Good overall assessment and understanding often leads to better planning for behavior outcomes because the root needs and issues are better understood and accounted for. In the La Crosse County sample, planning for behavior outcomes for children fared much better (all in the maintenance zone or high refinement zone) than planning a change process for parent/family behavior outcomes, where twenty-five percent scored in the maintenance zone; fifty-eight percent scored in the refinement zone and seventeen percent scored in the improvement zone. This area presents an opportunity for enhancement based on the scores from the sample. One case story highlights the important connection between a thorough assessment and good planning for behavioral outcomes. “It was unclear whether (team members) have a true understanding to the underlying issues that drive both parents to use drugs, to engage in criminal behavior, and to relapse after significant periods of sobriety. Additionally, the focus child’s mother appears to have experienced a significant amount of trauma in her life that has never really been assessed or treated. The reviewers were not able to determine if enough knowledge exists about both parents’ mental health issues. Possibly, if these issues were understood more completely, a clearer understanding would exist regarding what is driving the drug use and allow for more successful planning for behavioral changes for the parents.”

PLANNING A CHANGE PROCESS FOR SUSTAINABLE SUPPORTS: To what degree is a well-reasoned, ongoing planning process being used to drive strategies and actions for sustainable supports for the family that provides, as needed, for: Meeting basic necessities of life? Ongoing supports necessary for recovery and relapse prevention? Informal social supports necessary to sustain the family following Safe Case Closure?

Comments: Planning for sustainable supports is another area that could be enhanced. Twenty-five percent of the cases reviewed scored in the maintenance zone; while seventy-five percent were in the refinement zone. This indicator considers basic necessities, supports for recovery and relapse prevention and informal supports in sustaining a family once formal case management ceases. One case story taps into the difficulty in planning for sustainable supports. “While really good services have been secured to initiate some basic changes in parenting and stabilizing the child, there is a need for further assessment and understanding for *sustained* behavior changes. For example, the team is still assessing how the focus child can live successfully in the community and how mother can gain the skills needed to successfully parent him in her home.”



RESOURCE & SUPPORT USE: To what degree is/are the family and/or out-of-home caregiver actively being provided the training, in-home support, supervision, resources, support-development assistance, and relief necessary to provide a safe and stable living arrangement for the child that meets the child’s daily care, development, and parenting needs? If the child presents special needs with more extensive care requirements, to what degree is the family/out-of-home caregiver provided specialized support commensurate with that required to meet the child’s needs while maintaining stability of the home and family commitment to the child?

Comments: This indicator scored in the maintenance zone for eighty-three percent of the children and forty-two percent for the parents/families. As discussed in the first section of this report, which explored what was learned in focus groups, resources and supports in La Crosse County are a strength. This is demonstrated here, particularly with children, while the scores of parents illustrated a need for attention. One theme noted in a few of the case stories was a lack of information around the history of the parent(s), which resulted in less than optimal planning and implementing of resources and supports. In one case story, a delay in securing the child’s evaluation subsequently delayed lining up the appropriate resources for the parent. “Specific services aimed at boosting her parental capacities based on the focus child’s special needs have not yet been

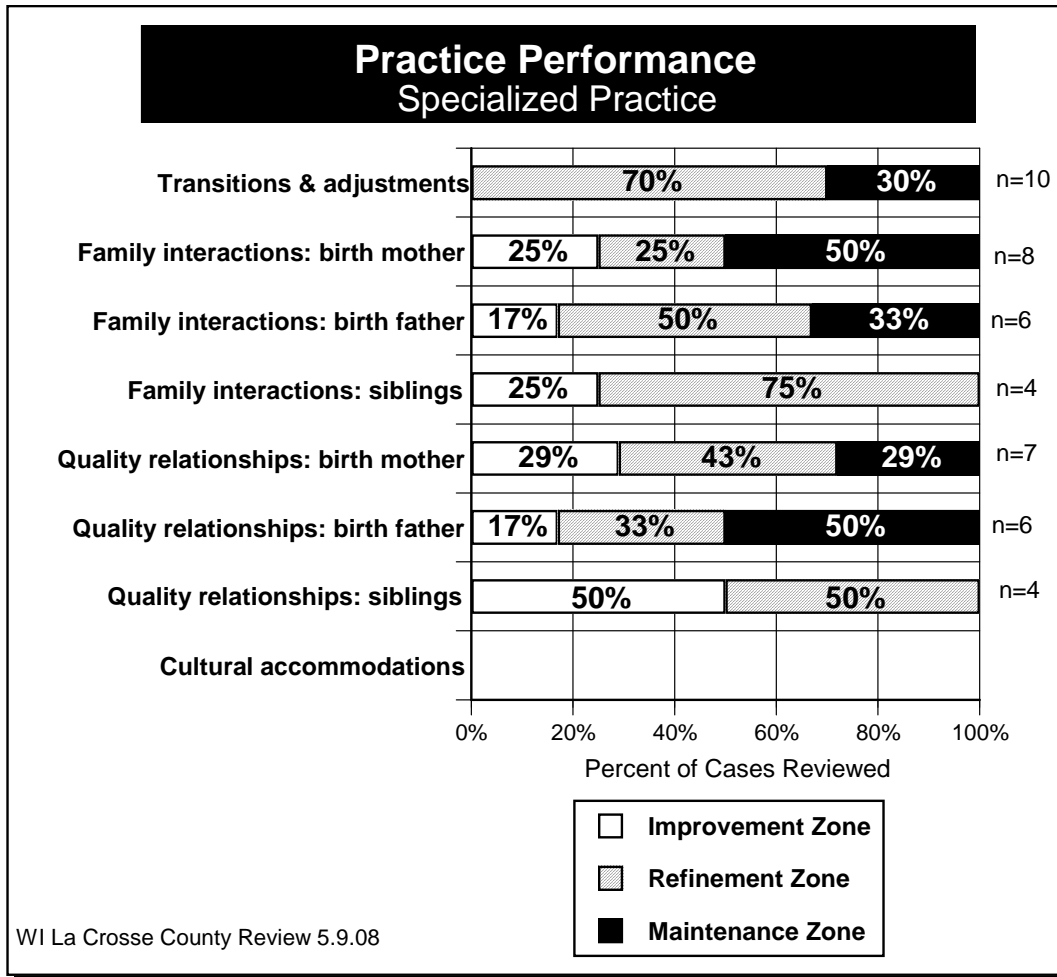
implemented; this will most likely begin to occur once his functioning and needs assessment is completed.”

INTERVENTION ADEQUACY FOR CHANGE: To what degree are the change-related interventions, actions, and resources provided to the child and family of sufficient power (precision, intensity, duration, fidelity, and consistency) to produce desired results and make timely progress necessary to meet Safe Case Closure requirements and to sustain family independence from the service system following closure?

Comments: While the previous indicator considers the range of resources and supports secured for a child and family, this indicator looks at the relative preciseness, intensity and duration of those services. It speaks to decisions around how much and how long a family should engage in services and the appropriate context of delivery. Forty-two percent of the cases reviewed in La Crosse County scored in the maintenance zone; fifty-eight percent scored in the refinement zone. The interventions were somewhat underpowered in terms of precision and intensity. Oftentimes if there is a lack in overall assessment and understanding, the power and precision of resources and supports are lacking because they are not matched to the underlying needs.

TRACKING AND ADJUSTMENT: Are the child and family status, intervention process, and change results routinely followed along and evaluated? Are strategies and services modified to respond to the changing needs and to apply knowledge gained about strategies and results to create a self-correcting service process for finding what works for the child and family?

Comments: This indicator states that intervention strategies should be modified when outcomes are met, when outcomes are not being met or when new needs arise and circumstances change. Tracking and adjustment is necessary in any change process and requires situational awareness, flexibility, adaptability and persistence to reach the end goal even when circumstances change. Generally, tracking scores in the counties across Wisconsin are slightly higher than adjusting scores and this was seen in La Crosse County as well. Seventy-five percent of cases scored in the maintenance zone for tracking, while fifty percent of cases scored in the maintenance zone for adjusting. This case story demonstrates good tracking and adjustment: “(The focus child) has been provided supervised visits with her father due to the factors in his history that present a safety risk. When the need for longer visits arose, the agency responded by increasing the length of the supervised visits to several hours at a time including weekends. In fact the tracking and adjustment has been consistently responsive throughout the life of this case.” Another case shows also shows how the team responded to progress. “(The team was) good at tracking and adjusting the plan until reunification occurred. An example would be that visits increased on a regular basis and were in the birth mother’s home. This continued on a gradual basis until the children were all returned home.”



TRANSITIONS & LIFE ADJUSTMENTS: Is the current or next life change transition for the child being planned, staged, and implemented to assure a timely, smooth, and successful adjustment for the child and family after the change occurs? Are transitional staging plans/arrangements being made to assure a successful transition and life adjustment in daily settings? If the child is returning home and to school following a temporary placement in foster care, treatment, or detention, is the transition and life adjustment sequence working? Is there follow-along support for the adjustment period?

Comments: The scores for this indicator suggest an opportunity for enhancement as seventy percent of the ten cases scored in the refinement zone. Anticipating future transitions and adjusting the resources and planning as needed often results in good scores. In one case reviewed, the team was grappling with the next set of transitions. “The focus child has many issues to face over the next few months and the transition plan for this child will be critical for her in the long-run.” Another case illustrates how a lack of cohesiveness among key members affects planning. “The transition is complicated by differing opinions from the mother, father, and prospective guardians regarding how long the guardianship will be necessary.”

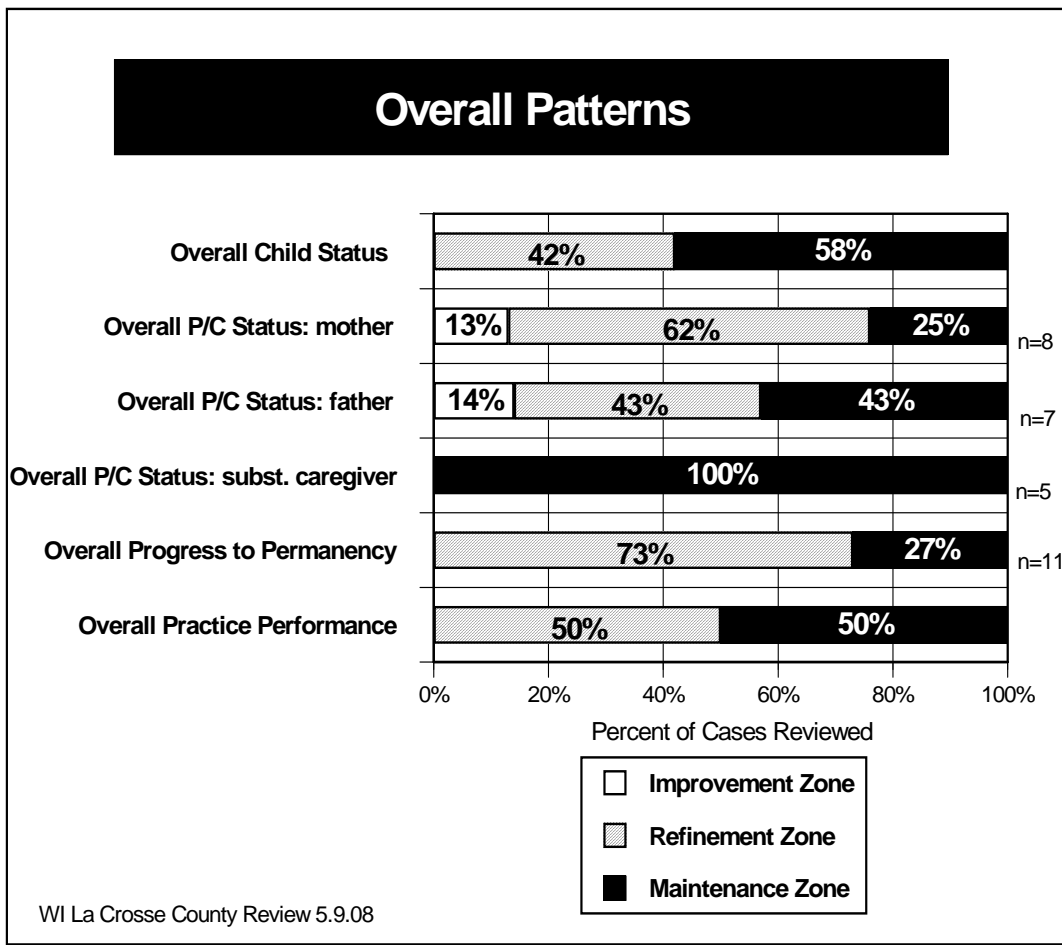
FAMILY INTERACTIONS: When children and family members are living temporarily away from one another, how well are specifically planned strategies and supports working to build and sustain family connections with meaningful interactions via frequent interaction and other means, unless compelling reasons exist for keeping them apart? To what degree are strategies and efforts being implemented to support the following between the child and his/her family members for: (1) Supporting frequent interactions via visitation and other means? And (2) Using varied and creative opportunities for family members to nurture one another?

QUALITY FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS: When children and family members are living temporarily away from one another, how well are specifically planned strategies and supports working to build and sustain good quality family relationships through various appropriate means, unless compelling reasons exist for keeping them apart? To what degree are current strategies and efforts enabling family members to improve and maintain the strengths and positive qualities of their relationships with one another?

Comments: These indicators look at not only the frequency of contact between family members, but also the quality of contacts. The area that seems to need the most attention in both of the indicators is sibling interactions, as the cases reviewed all scored in the refinement or improvement zone. There is also an opportunity for additional enhancement with mothers and fathers in regards to the frequency and quality of contacts. Some case stories highlight these opportunities. “There was little mention of the focus child’s relationships with her two half-siblings. ‘Best Practice’ would require more focus to be placed on the continuity of these sibling relationships.” In another case, attempts were made to engage the father but, frequent moves thwarted these efforts. “(The worker) has made numerous attempts to further engage the father and to keep him up to date with planning but finds it difficult given his frequent moves.”

SPECIALIZED CULTURAL ACCOMMODATIONS: How well have any major cultural issues of the child and family been identified and addressed in practice? If indicated, are specialized supports and services provided being made culturally appropriate via special accommodations in the family engagement, assessment, planning, and service delivery processes being used with this child and family?

Comments: There were no cases scored for this indicator of the twelve cases reviewed in La Crosse County.



VII. NEXT STEPS AND ACTION PLANNING

County staff, supervisors, and the director were encouraged to use the results of the review to formulate and implement an action plan to address enhancement of case practice and systems issues, which will ultimately result in improved outcomes for children and families in La Crosse County. Agency staff identified the following as areas of potential focus for system and practice improvement:

- Explore different teaming methods and select one
- Explore mental health (MH) and alcohol and other drug (AODA) issues and integrate into CPS system
- Look at transition between ongoing and adoption
- Efforts into cultural specific resources (foster homes)
- Assessing on going needs and then tracking and adjusting services as necessary
- Explore and develop informal supports with families
- Relative searches as early as possible
- More formal supports for relative placements
- Improve ICWA identification and notification
- Inviting GAL's to in house and core trainings

- Explain teaming better to stakeholders
- Explore sibling interactions and develop case specific guidelines
- Explain attorney fees to biological parents

The final “next steps” meeting of the review was used by the director, manager and supervisors to identify areas in which the agency should first focus on improving. Lu Rowley, the former Director of Waushara County Department of Human Services, was introduced as the facilitator who will be assisting the agency leadership and staff with the development and implementation of their action plan.

VIII. SUMMARY

The Quality Service Review in La Crosse County identified a number of strengths in practice from which to build. La Crosse County already embraces a progressive, creative approach to their case practice, agency organization and community involvement which will contribute to their future change planning and implementation. Another incredible strength seen in La Crosse County was the strong relationships both within the agency and among the community stakeholders; this is clearly an agency and surrounding community that understands the importance of mutual respect, clear and consistent communication and the exchange of ideas in improving practice and outcomes for children and families. Specific results of the review indicate strong engagement, ‘role and voice’, teaming and safety assessment and planning.

Overall, the review found that there is an opportunity in case practice to develop a “long term view” with team members, including children and families, early in the life of the case. Developing a “long term view” early on will help guide the change process. In addition, there is an opportunity to enhance overall assessment and understanding in case practice.