

Continuous Quality Improvement Quality Service Review

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*September 11-15, 2006
Marquette County Human Services*

**Child Welfare Continuous Quality Improvement Program
The Bureau of Programs and Policies,
Division of Child and Family Services,
Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services**

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

October 31, 2006

I. Introduction

The Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Program, within the Bureau of Programs and Policies (BPP), a Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) of the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS), uses the Quality Services Review (QSR) protocol to evaluate the case practice models of Wisconsin's county child welfare programs. The overarching goal for selection of this particular quality improvement model is to be able to generate useful information for staff at all levels of the county as to the outcomes for children and families served, the strengths of local practice and the opportunities for improving system performance.

It should be noted that the QSR process also provides an opportunity to gather additional information, which the department will use in reporting some federally required information, which is part of Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) and the state's Performance Enhancement Plan.

The Continuous Quality Improvement Team conducted a Quality Service Review in Marquette County during the week of September 11-15, 2006. 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.

II. The Marquette County Review

Reviewers

In the Marquette County review, five state employees [from CQI, the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare (BMCW) and Area Administration (AA)], two retired social workers, and one foster parent participated in reviewing the eight cases selected. A total of 74 persons were interviewed. The peer reviewers who were in training to become certified were observed and coached in their development as lead case reviewers. All the lead case reviewers who provided coaching have extensive experience in child welfare and have been trained in the mentoring process.

Stakeholder Interviewers

As a compliment to the individual case reviews, 11 focus groups were conducted with a total of 40 stakeholders from the local child welfare system participating. Terri Smyth and Monica Booe, CQI Specialists conducted these sessions. The external perspectives that were obtained provided valuable perspective, insight, and feedback regarding how all the systems that families are involved with, interface and perform with the child welfare agency, thereby affecting and influencing outcomes. Many of these focus groups were conducted in conjunction with the Children's Court Initiative Review that occurred during the same week as the QSR.

The Systemic Perspective (Macro View)

Strengths:

The strengths for Marquette County have been identified through the scoring of individual cases, the identification of practice and performance themes and the statements of the front line staff and child welfare partners in the focus groups. There is an overall consensus that Marquette County is staffed by creative, skilled and dedicated social workers. The staff is not only dedicated to children and families, but to each other. They work well together and support each other. Service providers for Marquette County have a great amount of respect for the workers and the job that they do. They see the staff as skilled in engaging families and keeping open lines of communication with all child welfare partners. The judicial partners report that the social workers are knowledgeable and well prepared for court. There has been minimal staff turnover in the past year among the social workers, which supports the development of strong teaming and strength based practice. This was reflected in the teaming and coordination scores from the individual cases as well.

The staff in turn is supported by the Director and Deputy Director who are invested in being accessible and are reported to be available for staffing cases and answering questions. The social workers are invited to participate in agency decision making. The Director and Deputy Director are both involved in committees at the local and state level. This effort enhances the community relationship with the agency and keeps the staff educated on new policy and procedures that is rolling out regarding social work practice and procedures. The Director is also involved in collaborative efforts to obtain grants that fund existing programs and new initiatives. Marquette County in conjunction with a contiguous county is adding a new service option through the Alternative Response Grant.

The children whose cases were reviewed in Marquette County are living in stable settings and are at low risk for re-occurrence of abuse. The specific case scores reflect areas of strength in the appropriateness of living arrangements and stability in the home and school settings. This includes identifying the best placement for the children involved with the agency. The attention to appropriate placement of children also supports the strong practice in Marquette County regarding the achievement of permanency for children. The agency does a good job of identifying the placement settings that are free of risk and safety issues, whether that is the natural home of a child, a relative placement or a more formal placement.

Marquette County has a wide array of services available for children and families. The providers make themselves accessible to the families and workers. The social workers have a positive relationship with the provider agencies. This allows the agency to be creative in the matching of services and providers to the specific needs of families. This is done through the utilization of coordinated care staffings with some families. This process helps to develop and implement family driven plans that help move those families towards permanency and independence from the agency.

System Challenges:

Marquette County has experienced a growth in the number of families who receive assistance through the economic support unit. Twenty five percent of the population in Marquette County is seniors. There has been a preponderance of families entering the child welfare system who present with long term, complex issues. There is an increase in the number of children and parents who are diagnosed with serious mental health and AODA issues. The agency is also challenged by these families who present with co-occurring issues that include:

- AODA issues (high recidivism rate for AODA related offenses)
- Ongoing mental health needs
- An increase in incarcerated parents
- A rise in the number of families with subsistence issues
- An increase in families with Domestic Violence and trauma issues

These issues make it increasingly difficult for families to live independently of the child welfare system.

Communication is critical in assisting families to move through the child welfare system and on to independence. There seems to be a need for increased communication between the agency and several community partners regarding the clarification of the role of the agency. It is also felt by some child welfare staff that they do not have a voice in the courtroom. Communication within the agency seems to be strong between workers and management.

The agency is doing a good job keeping children safe and connecting families with the appropriate services to meet their needs. However, there is an opportunity for growth when looking at planning and long term view for families. The question is often asked during interviews with workers, providers and families, "What is the long term view, how will you know when you are done working with the agency and the court?" This was a difficult question for people to answer in Marquette County. Cases are being opened appropriately for safety reasons, but then are being kept open for risk concerns. In many families there will always be some level of risk that exists. In 8 of the 10 rated cases the scores fell in the refinement zone. This practice is preventing families from attaining permanency and independence from the agency and court.

Statistics show that the length of placement for children in out of home care is impacted by the level of involvement that their families in the assessment, planning and implementation process. In Marquette County, as in the State of Wisconsin, involving fathers is an area that needs some immediate attention. Only twenty-nine percent of the cases scored in the maintenance zone for engagement with fathers or mothers. This is an area that impacts permanency, planning and long term view for children and families.

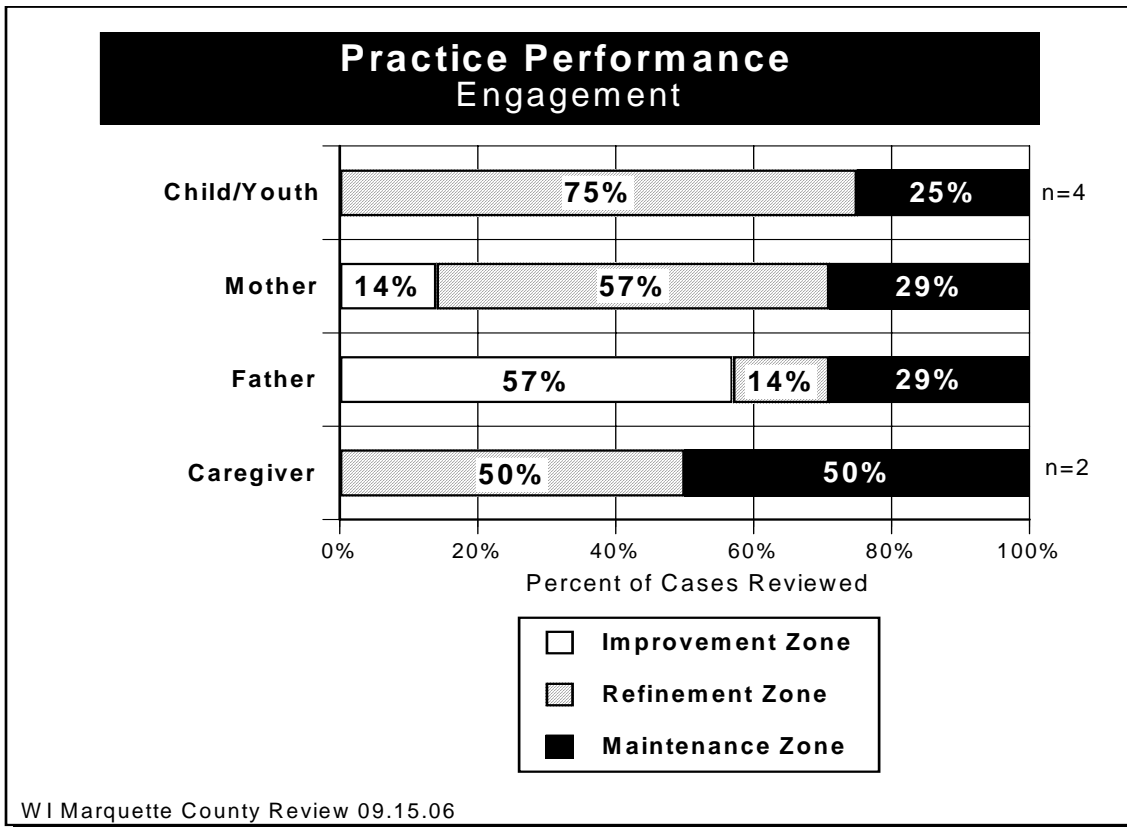
The Elements of Case Practice (The Micro View)

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 their efficacy and contribution in helping families develop, pursue and complete successful strategies of change. The scores on practice performance are presented to point out opportunities where the Department of Human Services (DHS) can focus their efforts in improving outcomes for the children and families they serve.

Definitions of Scores:

- **Maintenance zone:** Favorable status, efforts should be made to maintain or build upon this practice element
- **Refinement zone:** Minimal or marginal status, further efforts are necessary to refine this practice element
- **Improvement zone:** Problematic status, opportunity for strategic plan to improve this practice element

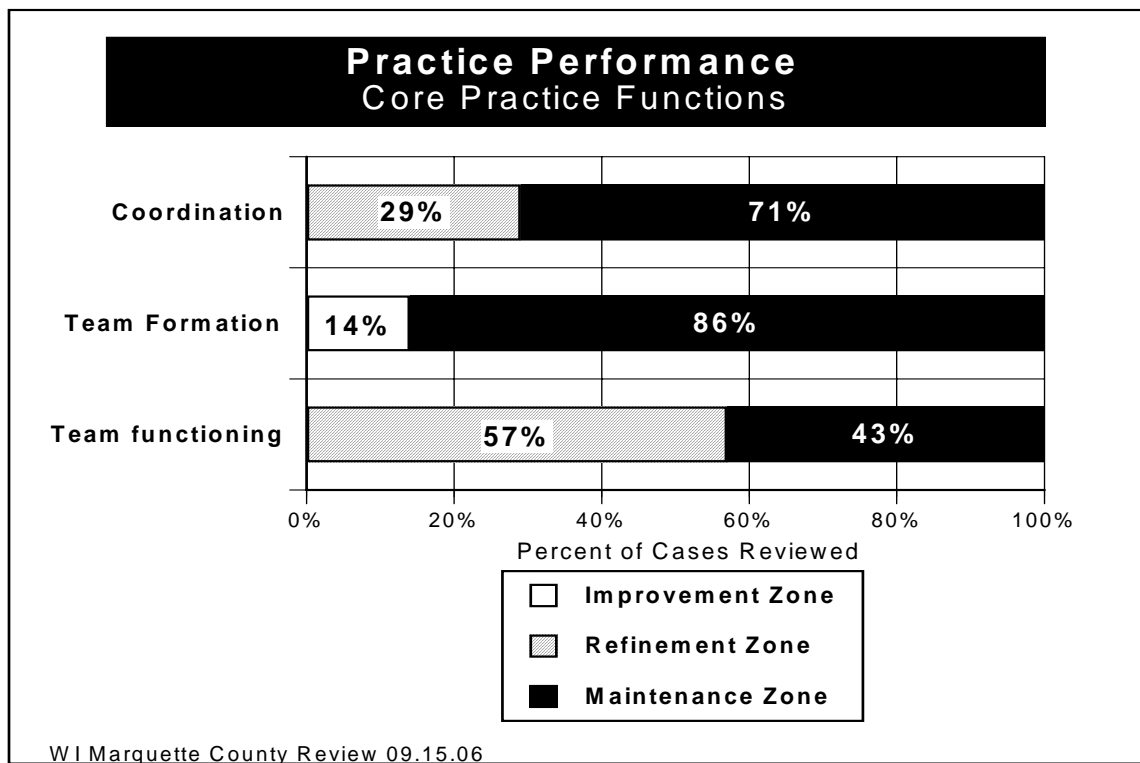
Note: n = (x) next to a bar in a graph signifies the number of cases meeting the specified criteria for the measurement. For some indicators, not all cases in the sample are scored



ENGAGEMENT: To what degree have the caseworker and other 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? Have they built a trust-based working relationship with the child, family, and/or others to support ongoing assessment, understanding, and service decisions? Have they built a mutually beneficial partnership with the child, family, and/or others to sustain their interest in and commitment to the change process?

Comments: Marquette County has established a solid practice pattern for engaging caregivers as shown in the quantitative summary of information from the cases that were reviewed. Of these cases, 50% fell within the maintenance zone. There is some room for improvement in engaging mothers in the planning and assessment process as shown by 29% of the cases scoring in the maintenance zone. Regarding engagement for fathers 57% of the cases reviewed scored in the improvement zone. This is an indication that more effort could be directed in locating, contacting and connecting with the fathers in open cases. This is reflective of the pattern throughout the State of Wisconsin.

In one of the cases that was reviewed the parents felt very positive about the relationship that they had with most of the team members. They that all members took their best interest into account while they are all working together. This family also felt that they had a voice in the teaming and planning process and believe that their worker is truly and advocate for them.



COORDINATION: To what degree was a single point of coordination and leadership necessary for convening and facilitating effective family change planning and

service decision processes used for this child and family? How effective was the coordination, integration, and continuity in the assessment, planning, organization, and provision of services to this child and family?

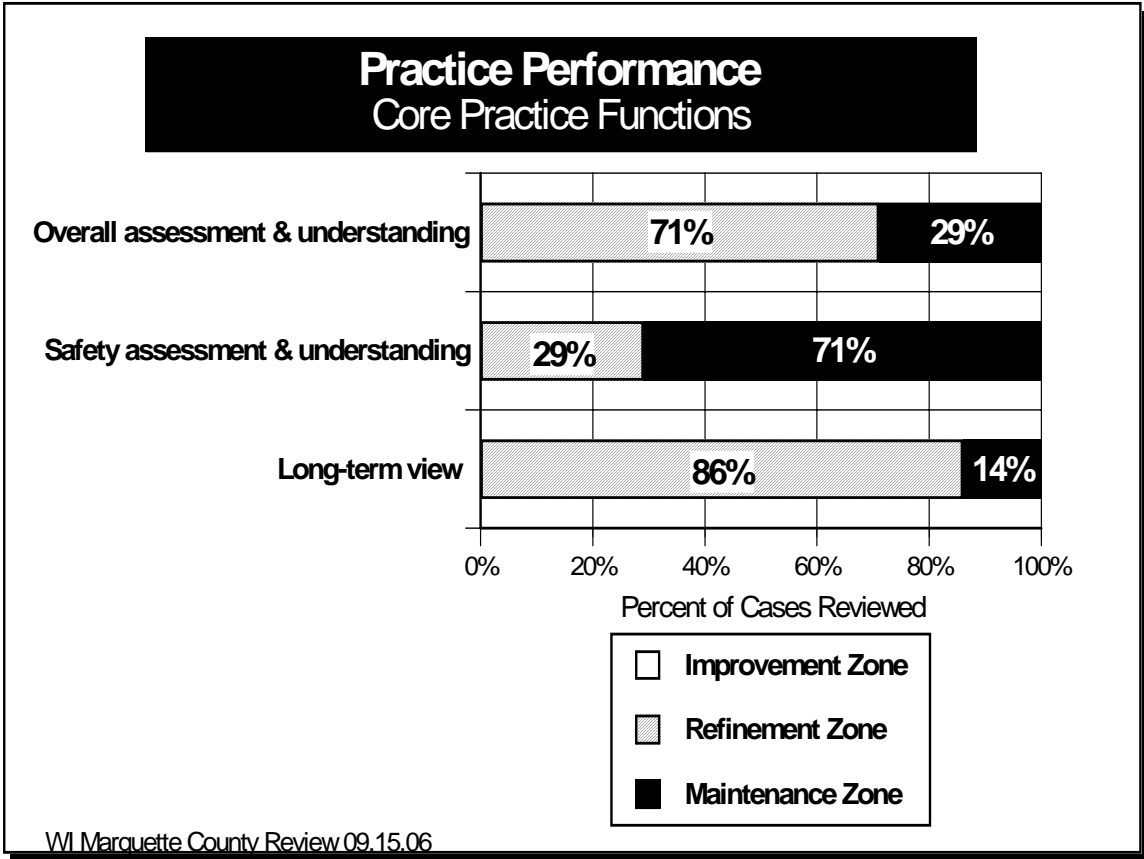
TEAM FORMATION: To what degree have persons who provided support and services for this child and family formed a working team that met, talked, and planned together? Did the team have the skills, family knowledge, and abilities necessary to organize effective services for the child and family?

TEAM FUNCTIONING: To what extent did the members of the family team collectively function as a unified team in planning services and evaluating results? Did the team's actions reflect a coherent pattern of effective teamwork and collaborative problem solving that benefited the child and family?

Comments: Marquette County utilizes integrated service teams to meet the needs of many children and families. Those families seem to be active members of those teams, helping develop and implement the treatment plan that works for them. The county is also able to implement this practice on an informal basis with the families they work with. This practice improves the level of coordination that happens with families and providers as reflected by 71% of the cases scoring in the maintenance zone for this outcome. There is some need to address the manner in which some of these teams function once they are formed. Fifty-three % of the cases need some refinement regarding team functioning.

The specific case stories should be reviewed to determine which cases could benefit from a more formal team process. In one particular family the team was well formed and comprised of professionals, the family, informal supports and members who had access to financial resources that supported the plans made by the team. This example supports the very high scores in team formation.

One case illustrated that a team can be well formed but it also needs to function well in order to be effective especially. In one of the teams all the members were identified and present at meetings however, there seemed to be a lack of communication causing confusion among members regarding the plan and implementation. This would be an example of a case that scored in the refinement zone for team functioning.



OVERALL ASSESSMENT & UNDERSTANDING: To what degree was there a shared big picture understanding of the child and family's strengths, needs, risks, and underlying issues that must change for the child to live safely and permanently with the family of origin, guardian, or adoptive family independent of agency supervision? Were these understandings used in the family change process to help the family achieve safety, permanency, and well-being (via protective provisions in the home, demonstrated behavioral, emotional, and cognitive changes)?

SAFETY ASSESSMENT AND UNDERSTANDING: To what degree was there a shared big picture understanding of the child and family's strengths, needs, risks, and underlying issues that must change for the child to live safely and permanently with the family of origin, guardian, or adoptive family? Were these understandings used in the family change process to help the family achieve safety, permanency, and well-being (via protective provisions in the home, demonstrated behavioral, emotional, and cognitive changes)?

Comments: In the seven cases that were reviewed and scored safety assessment and understanding scored four or above. The team members have a clear understanding of the safety issues or concerns for the children and families they are working with. Accurate understanding of safety issues assist families in moving towards independence from the agency. The team members in most cases that were reviewed have a good understanding of

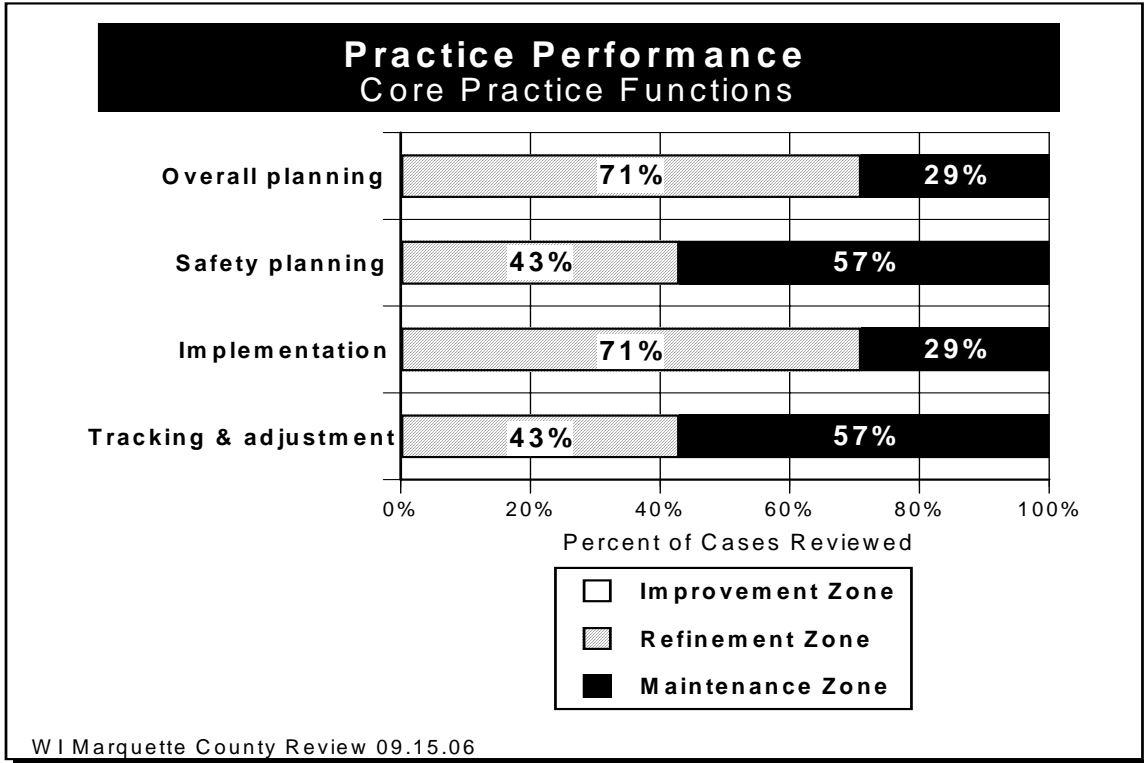
the overall issues that are challenging the families they work with. This is reflected by the scores of all seven cases that were scored falling in the refinement or maintenance zone.

There is a very clear connection between the existence of a strong team and a thorough assessment of a family's core issues and needs. An example of this connection was seen in one of the cases reviewed where the team met very regularly. The members of the team were able to clearly identify the very unique strengths and needs that this family was facing. The team was able to connect on a more personal level with the focus child also through the teaming and assessment process.

LONG-TERM VIEW: To what degree were the change requirements for family independence defined, shared, and understood that clarified what protective provisions must be present in the home to keep children and parents safe? What behavioral, emotional, or cognitive patterns must be demonstrated and sustained for reunification or support of the guardian/adoptive family so external supervision may be safely concluded?

Comments: Despite the great use of teaming for assessment, planning and implementation there seems to be a disconnect between the identification of the main issues and services for families and what the end result of services will be for the family. It was difficult for most of the people who were interviewed to identify when a family would reach permanence or independence from the agency in Marquette County. This was reflected in only twenty-nine percent of the cases scoring a five or above.

In one case that was reviewed there were several rather diverse opinions about the viability of the current plan and what the actual long term view was for this child. Several members questioned the ability of the family to maintain this child in the home until maturity. Without a definite end goal, the plan was less than effective for the child.



OVERALL PLANNING: To what degree was a well-reasoned ongoing process used for planning that drives strategies and actions for the family change process that provides, as needed, for: attainment of protective conditions for safety in the home; acquisition and demonstration of required parent behavioral, emotional, and/or cognitive changes; securing sustainable family supports; concurrent alternatives for child permanency; meeting any special needs of persons (children/parents) in the home; and achieving successful transitions and life adjustments?

SAFETY PLANNING: To what degree was a well-reasoned ongoing process used that analyzed and planned a strategy that ensured the safety of all children in the home? Did the plan attain the protective conditions for safety in the home; plan for parents to acquire and demonstrate required behavioral, emotional, and/or cognitive changes; secure sustainable family supports; concurrent alternatives for child permanency; meeting any special needs of children/parents in the home; and achieve successful transitions and life adjustments?

Comments: The planning that is happening for the children and families in Marquette County appears to be meeting their needs rather effectively. The planning around safety scored especially well which seems to correlate with the scores for safety assessment for these same cases. While there were no cases that fell in the improvement zone for planning there is some room for refinement regarding the overall planning for families. This could be a direct correlation to the fine tuning that needs to be done regarding the functioning of some of the teams that are working for the families in Marquette County.

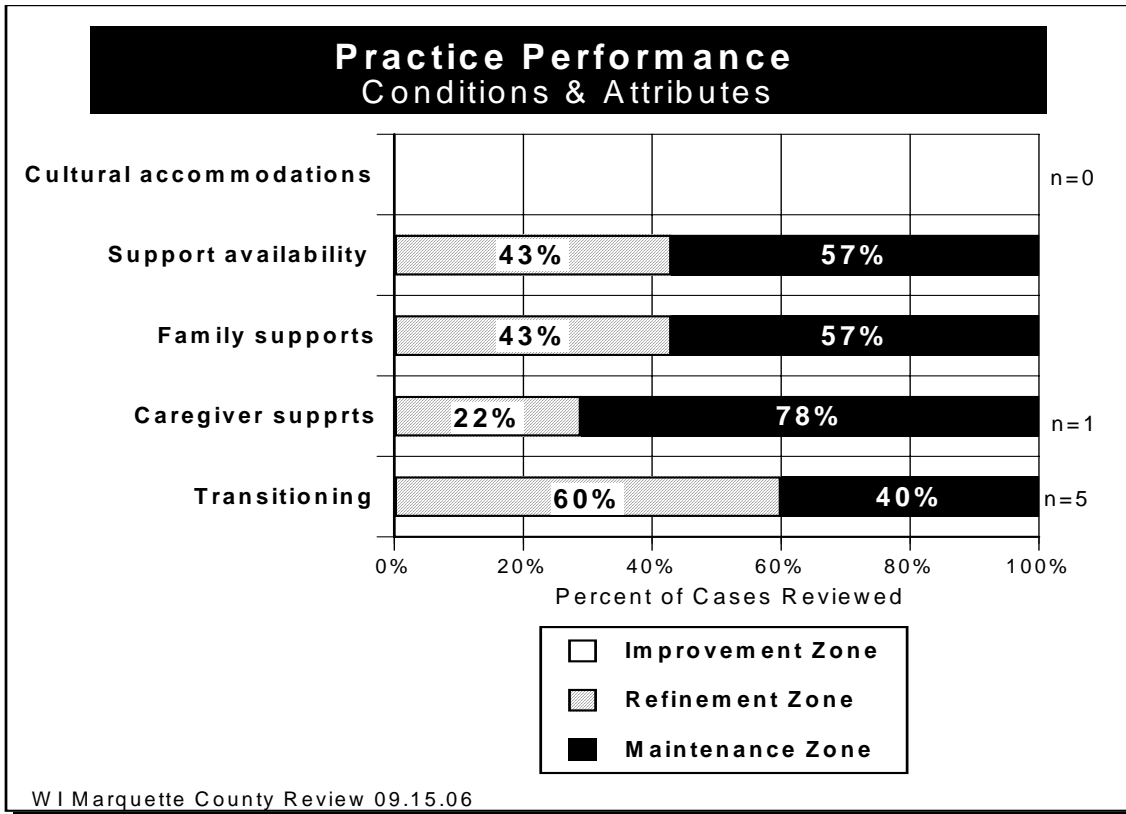
IMPLEMENTATION: [How well were the actions, timelines, and resources planned for family change strategies being implemented to achieve: attainment of protective conditions for safety; acquisition and demonstration of required parental behavioral, emotional, and/or cognitive changes; securing of sustainable supports; concurrent alternatives for attaining permanency; meeting special needs of parents and children; and achieving successful transitions and life adjustments? To what degree were these timely, competent, and adequate in intensity and continuity?]

Comments: If the plan for a child is not clear for all team members this will make it difficult to adequately implement the plan. In this county the overall case planning for families is an area where opportunities for improvement exist. This then has impacted the ability of the team members for a child to put the plan into action. Implementation is also an area where there is opportunity for improvement in five of the seven cases that were reviewed and scored.

TRACKING AND ADJUSTMENT: [Have the child and family status, service process, and change results routinely been followed along and evaluated? Have services been modified to respond to the changing needs and knowledge about service efforts that have been applied to create a self-correcting service process for finding what works for the child and family?]

Comments: The agency is monitoring the plans that are in place. The teams do meet on a regular basis which allows for reporting from all members regarding how the family is doing and what they need to continue to move forward towards independence from the agency. This is reflected in the scores for this outcome falling primarily in the maintenance zone.

Marquette County has developed relatively strong practice regarding implementation of plans and the ability to monitor and change those plans according to the needs of the family and the long term view. In one case however, the monitoring of the plan really occurred when the focus child's behavior changed and the thus the plan needed to change. Once the child's behavior stabilized the plan was not reviewed regularly and the case seemed to stall. This then affected the family's ability to move closer to achieving independence from the system.



CULTURAL ACCOMODATIONS: Have significant cultural issues of the child and family been identified and addressed in practice? Have the supports and services been culturally during the family engagement, assessment, planning, and service delivery processes?

Comments: Marquette County is primarily a rural area with very limited cultural or ethnic diversity. There were no children within the pool of cases reviewed who required a score in cultural accommodations.

SUPPORT AVAILABILITY: To what degree has the formal and informal array of supports, services, and other resources been adequate and available to support implementation of the child and family planning process? Are resources available in a timely manner at the appropriate frequency, duration, and setting conducive to the needs of the child and family? Did the child and family have a choice of the type of services and providers?

FAMILY/CAREGIVER SUPPORTS: To what degree was the family or out-of-home caregiver provided with 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?

Comments: Marquette is a rural county but there seems to be a wide array of services and supports available to families. These families and the caregivers for children felt that the services were appropriate to meet the individual needs that were being presented by the children and parents in the cases that were reviewed. The caregivers in particular felt that they received training, services and supports to assist them in providing for the needs of the children in their care. According to the scores on the graph below, 78% of the cases were in the maintenance zone and the other 22% were in the refinement zone.

In several cases the foster parents felt especially supported by the workers and the other team members. They reported that the staff was very good about keeping them informed regarding the children in their care. The workers consistently responded to the needs of the foster parents.

In another case the family was provided with a vast array of services to help keep the child in the home. These services addressed the child's needs as well as the mother's extreme spending addiction that impacted the stability of the home.

TRANSITIONING: To what degree was the current or next life change transition for the child and family planned and implemented to assure a timely, smooth, and successful adjustment after the change occurs?

Comments: Despite the need for improvement regarding the development of a long term view for families, workers in Marquette County are able to accurately identify what transition a child will be facing in almost all of the cases that were scored. These transitions are being consistently planned for and are occurring in a positive manner.

Teaming again has been shown to have a direct correlation with one particular family's ability to move smoothly through the focus child's transition from foster care back to the child's home. Through teaming and planning the team identified a respite need that would help with reunification. An informal respite provider was then located and put into place for this family to help them adjust to the child's return home.

Agency Next Steps

- Relationships and roles with Law Enforcement and Schools – Regroup teaming and roles together
- Formal note taking at team meetings
- Support for workers regarding documentation and paperwork
- Better identification of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA) and mental health (MH) issues in the families the agency serves
- Developing a budgeting program for families with a local lending institutions
- More attention to involving fathers in the family team
- Better documentation throughout the case
- Strive to develop informal supports/services for families
- Transition of services and families throughout the case (involving all partners)
- More attention to Long-Term View for families to help know when we're done

- Agency information provided to the community as to what the agency is able to do and not do
- Educate the community regarding how to support agency workers in their roles
- Revisit the volunteer and mentor programs for youth and families
- Celebrate the successes of the agency and all involved