

**Continuous Quality Improvement
Quality Service Review**

FINAL REPORT

February 4 – 8, 2008

Sauk 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*

July 25, 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 Services 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 Sauk County during the week of February 4, 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 DHFS.

II. THE SAUK COUNTY REVIEW

A. REVIEWERS

In the Sauk County review, six pairs of reviewers participated in reviewing the twelve cases selected. A total of 105 persons were interviewed. Two reviewers served as mentors to their review partners, who were in the role of "Shadow 2" reviewers for the review week. The "Shadow 2" reviewers, a Permanency Consultant from the Children's Court in Milwaukee County and a supervisor from a respective county-based human services department, were observed and coached in their development as lead case reviewers. The two case reviewers who provided coaching have extensive experience in child welfare. The remainder of the review team was comprised of four CQI Specialists, a Program Evaluation Manager (PEM) from the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare, a Quality Assurance Specialist for state adoptions, a Human Service Area Coordinator, as well as a director and two supervisors from respective county-based human services departments.

In addition to the reviewers that participated in the Quality Service Review, two reviewers were involved in the "Pathways to Permanency" review of two post-

termination of parental rights (TPR) cases. This review team was comprised of a CQI Specialist and a Quality Assurance Specialist with state adoptions.

B. CASE SAMPLE

Ten cases were randomly selected for review in Sauk County. The county requested that two of their more challenging cases be included in the review sample and these two cases completed the total sample of twelve. 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 Sauk County review, a total of 105 persons were interviewed. Of the twelve cases, there were three in-home cases and nine out-of-home cases. Three children were in the 0-4 age range, four children in the 5-9 age range, three children were in the 10-13 age range, and two children were over the age of 14. There were seven males and five 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 Julie Fliss conducted these sessions. In addition, Bridget Bauman and John Strange of the Children’s Court Initiative (CCI) 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

Sauk County is a mid-sized county compared to the other counties in Wisconsin. Although comprised of many isolated rural communities, Sauk County is unique in its draw of transient populations who come from neighboring counties in search of resources and seasonal employment. Community members note an increase in jobs for the working poor, as well as increased numbers of students eligible for the free and reduced lunch program in the schools.

Sauk County experienced a 5.5 percent population increase (2006) since the 2000 census. Whereas the great majority of the population is comprised of Caucasian people, there has been a notable increase in the Hispanic population. According to 2006 projections, 2.1 percent of the county's population is made up of people of Hispanic or Latino descent; however, this does not include undocumented immigrants. The increase in this

population has proven to be challenging for the Department due to limited access to Spanish-speaking workers and culturally competent services.

In addition, the American Indian population comprises 0.9 percent of the population. Ho-Chunk Casino, Hotel and Convention Center is located in Sauk County and offers a wealth of resources to the American Indian population and the community as a whole. It is one of the largest employers in the county. Overall, this facility is considered to be a great asset to the county.

III. THE SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVE (MACRO VIEW)

A. ORGANIZATIONAL – STRENGTHS

Many organizational strengths were identified by the participants of the focus groups. Participants overwhelmingly spoke of the professionalism of the staff and their strong commitment to the children and families of Sauk County. Individuals described the workers as "competent" and knowledgeable of the families with whom they are working. County staff are supportive of each other and willing to offer assistance to others when it is needed, especially to newer workers. It was further noted that the Child Protective Services (CPS) supervisor "goes above and beyond" for her staff to the extent that she will even "step in to do front end case management" when needed. Individuals added that the CPS supervisor will occasionally take on case assignments to have a better sense of what workers face in their everyday practice, as well as a better understanding of the needs of the children and families they serve.

The CPS supervisor is accessible to her staff, as well as the community as a whole. She is available to discuss any concerns or questions that stakeholders have regarding the system or a certain family. The CPS supervisor also provides training to school personnel and other community members on the child welfare system and the Wisconsin Children's Code (Chapter 48). Focus group participants noted that the CPS supervisor's accessibility and outreach to community partners have had a positive impact on the agency's relationships with some of the local schools, as well as other community stakeholders. One favorable outcome of this outreach was the addition of school social workers at some of the area schools and districts. Many described the school social workers to be an asset, as they help families access services and resources that may prevent future involvement with the agency. Furthermore, individuals noted that communication between the agency and the school often goes more smoothly when the school has a social worker.

The CPS supervisor is only one among a team of divisional supervisors with the agency. The supervisors look to each other as resources when brainstorming strategies to address a certain situation and as supports when in need someone to listen. Whereas each supervisor's division may have unique responsibilities, they frequently serve the same families. In order to make the process easier on families, the supervisors maintain open communication in order to work together when identifying the best resources for families and to avoid the overlap of services. The agency offers a number of services and

resources in one centralized location in Baraboo so that the residents of Sauk County do not have to go to various locations to meet their needs. However, the Department recognized that Baraboo may not be as accessible for residents who live in the more rural communities, so they also have a separate office in Reedsburg to serve these populations.

The needs and challenges facing children and families are continually changing and as result, the way in which child welfare systems intervene and the services in which they provide to address these challenges are also changing. As the agency the needs of their families increase and become more severe, they found that they were not able to spend as much time addressing the needs of families where there is a risk for maltreatment before the concerns rose to level that warranted formal CPS intervention. In order to better meet the needs of these families, the agency, in contract with Lutheran Social Services, hired a social worker specifically to work with families on early intervention services. Individuals indicated that the addition of this position has helped families access resources and services that may have prevented their involvement with Child Protective Services. Many believe that this has resulted in decreased assignments and caseloads that are more manageable for ongoing caseworkers. In general, focus group participants acknowledged the administration's openness to new initiatives and suggestions for "non-traditional" services to find the best strategies to meet the needs of children and families. Individuals voiced that the administration is proactive in seeking funding streams and does not want lack of funding to be a barrier to the implementation of new initiatives. Furthermore, the Department has a positive relationship with the Human Services Board and the full County Board and is fortunate to receive a great deal of support from them in the work they do with the children and families of Sauk County.

Another identified organizational strength is the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was developed between the Ho-Chunk Nation and Sauk County. The agency and the Ho-Chunk Nation collaborated to develop the MOU in an effort to enhance working relationships and increase collaboration when working with the same families. The establishment of the MOU was said to have improved communication between the Ho-Chunk Nation and Sauk County.

B. ORGANIZATIONAL – CHALLENGES

Although focus group participants identified many strengths for the organization, they also recognized some challenges. As noted above, the MOU between the Ho-Chunk Nation and Sauk County has resulted in improved communication between the two parties. However, individuals further noted that there is still room for improvement and continued efforts toward the implementation of the MOU. For example, participants expressed concerns that some agency staff have not yet been trained on the MOU and that this may have affected the intended progress of the MOU. Others commented that the MOU should be used as the practice model for how the agency worker and the ICW worker can effectively collaborate to achieve positive outcomes for children and families of Ho-Chunk heritage. However, individuals further noted that implementing this model into daily practice across all families is a challenge if the worker has not yet been trained on the MOU.

Another area that was identified as a challenge is the increase in young children with significant behavioral issues and mental health needs. Individuals commented that they are seeing these concerns in children at elementary school age and sometimes younger. The schools are lacking resources and services to address the considerable needs of these children and often turn to the Department for assistance. The challenge lies not only in the increased presence of these concerns in this population, but also in that there are limited services available to the schools and the county agency to adequately address the needs of these children. Individuals have indicated that some young children have been referred to the delinquency system in an attempt to help them get services; however, this is not a good fit for the needs of these children.

The Department has reportedly seen an increase in the number of delinquency cases with many of the cases being court ordered instead of an offer of voluntary services for the youth and family. Individuals added that they are seeing more overlap in the needs of the families served by the delinquency and child protection units. Concerns were further expressed regarding truancy cases and that the system as a whole does not have an effective strategy to address this issue. Many identified truancy to be a challenge in the community and that the schools and the agency need to consider how to better address the needs of children who are truant. Thus, at the time of the review, a truancy committee had recently been developed of school and agency staff to focus on this concern.

While the CPS supervisor was described as an asset to the agency, she has a number of responsibilities that pull her in many different directions. In order to keep up with it all, she works long hours and is available to her staff around the clock. It is evident that supporting her staff is her top priority, yet there is a high likelihood that the supervisor will experience burnout if she continues at her current rate without any additional assistance. Though her staff have been relatively stable, the CPS supervisor has experienced some changes in staff due to maternity leaves, and at the time of the review she had received the resignation of an ongoing worker. The changes in staff can affect outcomes for children and families, as well as the daily responsibilities of the CPS supervisor.

C. RESOURCES – STRENGTHS

Sauk County was described as an area that has a wealth of resources available to its children and families. The county is quite fortunate to have a strong tribal presence and a number of valuable resources through the Ho-Chunk Nation. In addition to the hotel, casino and convention center, the Tribe has a Wellness Center, which offers counseling, medical services and alcohol and other drug treatment, in addition to a number of other services. The Ho-Chunk Nation also has Indian Child Welfare (ICW) workers who may be assigned to work with families who have been referred for concerns of child maltreatment and are either enrolled members of the Tribe or eligible for enrollment. The ICW workers collaborate with the agency worker to help facilitate case management

responsibilities in accordance with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). ICW workers also conduct home studies for potential placement resources and work with agency caseworkers to identify culturally competent services for tribal families. In the individual case reviews, there were cases in which the Ho-Chunk Nation was integral in moving the family toward safe reunification of the child to the birth home. This will be discussed further in the comments for the status and practice performance indicators.

Focus group participants reported the agency also offers a variety of resources that have proven beneficial to the children and families of Sauk County. As noted previously, the experienced, dedicated staff are a significant resource. Included as part of the staff are parent aides who provide assistance with transportation, supervision of family interactions and in-home parenting and coaching. Individuals noted that the parent aides play a critical role in helping parents learn and sustain the necessary behavioral changes to safely care for their children. The Department also has psychiatrists and psychologists on staff to conduct mental health and/or alcohol and other drug assessments and follow-up out-patient treatment as needed. Caseworkers and supervisors are able to consult with them on cases and the psychologists and psychiatrists also make time in their busy schedules to participate in team meetings with other providers and family members. The consultation with the mental health providers has helped the team to have a more clear assessment and understanding of the families' strengths and needs.

There are various forums in which professionals and family members can participate in teams, including but not limited to Families Come First, Family Partnership Initiative, Collaborative Forum and Challenging Children's Workgroup. This use of a teaming model was identified as a resource to participants in the focus groups because it allows individuals a venue for open communication and collaborative decision making. Often, service providers, family members, substitute care providers and school personnel are invited to attend and participate. It was further noted that school personnel (social workers, educators, administrators and liaison officers) "go above and beyond", while staying after school hours, in order to be present for the meetings. Many recognized the value of the family's role on the team and in achieving successful outcomes for children. In addition to school personnel, foster parents were identified as a positive resource. The foster parents were identified as knowledgeable and prepared. Participants commented that the Partners in Alternative Care Education (PACE) training and the Foster Parent Support Group have helped to create a strong pool of knowledgeable, caring foster parents in Sauk County.

One additional resource that was identified repeatedly as a strength was the Children's Waiver. Through the Children's Waiver, the Department is able to use federal monies to match county spending to help families who have children with special needs access resources. For example, the agency has used the Children's Waiver to obtain respite services for families. Although it was not a significant amount of respite, one individual commented that the few hours made "a world of difference" for the family. Moreover, one of the families in the individual review case sample was accessing a number of services because of the Children's Waiver and many of those interviewed felt that these services will help the family to reach successful reunification.

D. RESOURCES – CHALLENGES

Similar to many other counties in Wisconsin, Sauk County is challenged to find dental, medical and mental health providers for children and parents who are on Medical Assistance or have no health insurance. Focus group participants also noted a shortage of child psychiatrists. Whereas individuals identify the psychiatrists and psychologists who work for the Department as a good resource, they also acknowledge that the agency providers are spread thin and that the community relies heavily on them because of the limited pool of providers. The Department is doing what they can to keep up with the demand for these services; however, it has been a challenge to keep up with all of the children and families who are in need of such services. Furthermore, 58 percent of the parents in the review sample had a diagnosed mental illness and 92 percent of parents had been exposed to trauma as a child and/or as an adult. For children, 25 percent had a diagnosed mental illness and 75 had been exposed to trauma. This is notable considering the identified challenge of accessing mental health providers, especially those who specialize in working with children.

Another challenge for the families of Sauk County is the lack of transportation, daycare and housing resources. Focus group participants indicated that the families that become involved with the child welfare system often need help accessing basic needs before they can address the underlying issues of why they became involved with the system. Individuals noted that parents may be able to find second shift employment, but do not have transportation to get to work or daycare during the night hours for their children. This subsequently affects families' ability to pay rent, putting their housing in jeopardy. In addition, Sauk County has many rural communities that are more isolated from the larger municipalities where many of the services are located. Transportation is especially difficult for these populations and may impact their ability to access the services needed to make the behavioral changes necessary to achieve independence from the agency. However, participants advised that if transportation resources were available, parents would still be challenged to access resources (such as in-home therapy, parenting groups and mentors) that work along side the parent "in the moment" as opposed to a parenting class that simply tells them what to do.

Given the increase in the number of Hispanic residents in the county, the agency has been challenged to offer resources to effectively serve this population. Individuals noted that most service providers are not Spanish-speaking and thus, must rely on interpreters to communicate with children and families; however, many stated that this is not an ideal strategy for effective communication. Focus group participants expressed the value not only of having greater access to Spanish-speaking service providers, but also culturally competent services to best understand and meet the needs of the families with whom they are working.

The system as a whole has been challenged by the increasing presence of children in the elementary schools who have significant behavioral issues and/or mental health needs. The community is currently lacking services to address such special needs for children in

this age group. Focus group participants advised that there are day treatment programs that have an educational component for youth and teens in middle or high school, but there are no services like this available for children in elementary school. Individuals identified this to be a challenge for the entire system as there is a notable lack of services to address the needs of these children.

E. PRACTICE – STRENGTHS

A number of practice strengths were identified throughout the focus groups conducted during the review week. Individuals commented that the Department has made a concerted effort to intervene with families who are at-risk for maltreatment before the situation warrants more formal involvement with the system. As noted previously, the addition of a contracted social worker has allowed the Department to identify families who need assistance earlier and implement services, resources and supports based on the strengths and needs of the family. Focus group participants further noted that the families often welcome the help and appreciate receiving assistance from the agency and other community providers on a voluntary basis. The effort to intervene with more families early on has likely had a positive impact on the number of Child in Need of Protection and Services (CHIPS) cases being filed, which reportedly has decreased since the addition of the contracted worker.

Focus group participants also highlighted strengths when children need to be placed out-of-home due to safety concerns. Individuals stated that the Department understands that being removed from their home can be a traumatic experience for a child. The agency takes great strides to make the child more comfortable by seeking appropriate relative placements and placing siblings in the same home whenever possible. One of the cases in the review sample illustrated the agency's commitment to keeping siblings together. Two siblings were placed in a treatment foster home, though neither child required additional care at that level. However, this was the only placement resource that was available at that time that not only could take both children, but that was also in their school district, so they could remain at their same schools. The use of relative caregivers and providers willing to take sibling groups has likely had a favorable effect on the stability of the placement, another strength that was highlighted in focus groups. In general, individuals indicated that children in out-of-home care do not appear to be moving from home to home. Data gathered by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Bureau of Program Integrity (BPI) confirms that children in Sauk County are stable in their out-of-home placements. Data collected between July 1, 2006 and June 30, 2007 show that about 91 percent of the children in out-of-home care were only in 1 or 2 placement settings during that time. This is above the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) National Standard of 86.7 percent.

In addition, focus group participants identified a few areas that they consider strengths in practice, yet noted a need for further attention in order to expand these practices in daily work with families. One such area was the identification and engagement of absent or uninvolved parents in the change process. Many acknowledged that efforts in this have improved, as all parties understand the value in including all parents; however,

individuals also noted that there is still room for improvement. Another area that was identified as a strength was the use of family teaming, which is a principal inherent throughout the practice model imbedded in the QSR. Family teaming provides everyone involved with the family the opportunity to exercise collaborative decision making in all aspects of the change process. The family drives this practice by being a leading member of the team and identifying individuals who they feel should be included on the team. One of the ways in which family teaming was found to be effective by focus group participants was in identifying the least restrictive placement options for children and youth. Individuals found this to be an effective strategy to achieve positive outcomes for families and to sustain the changes needed to reach safe case closure. Thus, focus group participants identified this as a practice strength that they would like to see implemented on a greater level, across all families who come into contact with the child welfare system.

F. PRACTICE – CHALLENGES

Focus group participants advised that the families with whom they work face some of the same struggles, yet require individualized assessments and strategies to fully address their unique, underlying needs. Yet, individuals noted that case plans and court orders do not always reflect these unique needs. Comments were made that the recommendations for the family that are documented on the on court orders tend to be "broad" and "general". It was further noted that the use of more "generic" case plans create challenges for the families, as they can appear confused and do not seem to have a clear understanding what they must do in order to safely care for their child(ren) and become independent from the agency. Focus group participants advised that some court orders are "tailored" to the strengths and needs of the family, but added that it was more common to "see pretty much the same" recommendations across families.

Focus group participants expressed a concern that recommendations not only tend to be broad, but often do not provide benchmarks to track whether or not the family has made progress toward achieving the goal. For example, the recommendations tend to be more service driven, such as asking the parent to complete a certain parenting class, as opposed to behavior driven, such as asking the parent to demonstrate a certain skill that he or she may have learned in the class. As a result, the parent may have completed the class, yet may not be able to demonstrate that he or she learned any skills. Moreover, the parent believes that he or she has made progress toward independence from the agency in completing the class. The parent will likely become less engaged with the change process if asked to complete additional services without understanding the purpose or the behavioral changes required of the parent.

Another area that focus group participants identified as a challenge to their practice was the engagement of parents experiencing co-occurring conditions in the change process. Individuals indicated that there has been "a shift" in the population over the years and the Department and other community agencies have seen an increase in the severity of the issues facing the families that they serve. Mental illness, poverty and drug addiction were described as the primary issues facing the families, according to participants. Many

added that there has also been an increase in the number of families who are struggling with a number of these conditions. Individuals further explained that addressing the needs of such families and establishing permanency for their children can be a challenge, especially within the time limits determined in the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA).

G. LEGAL – STRENGTHS

Focus group participants identified many strengths within the legal system in Sauk County. Individuals described the judges to be respectful of the agency staff and families and to be invested in positive outcomes for children. Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers were viewed as helpful and "as an extra set of eyes and ears" for children and families. Individuals further noted that there are some guardians ad litem (GAL's) who are taking the time to meet with the children, families and substitute caregivers who are assigned to them, and that these GAL's are more knowledgeable of their families as a result of these meetings.

The Corporation Counsel was repeatedly identified as an asset and a resource both to the agency and to other legal stakeholders. Participants advised that the Corporation Counsel is willing to consult with caseworkers to determine whether a family's case requires court intervention or if an informal agreement is possible. This has proven to be beneficial for families as the agency has been more mindful of the cases they are referring for court intervention and it is believed to have also lead to decreased caseloads for workers. It was evident that individuals rely on the Corporation Counsel to make sure that the court process runs smoothly and efficiently. Many advised that the Corporation Counsel will advise the judges if someone (parent, substitute caregiver, caseworker, etc.) is present and wishes to speak during court and also reminds the judges to make ASFA and Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) findings on the case record. There is also a regular GAL meeting that the Corporation Counsel and CPS supervisor will occasionally attend to update the judges and GAL's on changes in the law or on other relevant topics. Overall, these meetings have helped to get everyone on the same page.

Another strength that was noted among focus group participants was that parents are being appointed legal representation when it is requested. Many added that the judges are careful to appoint an attorney to parents at any time when it appears that the case is likely going toward the termination of parental rights (TPR). Although there had previously been a delay in the processing of TPR cases, individuals noted that this is no longer the case and that both TPR and CHIPS cases are now moving through the court process more smoothly. Currently, these cases are being handled by one individual, the Corporation Counsel, and this is likely the reason the process has improved.

H. LEGAL – CHALLENGES

There were some areas in which focus group participants identified inconsistencies in the system that can result in challenges for families, as well as the system. For example, though some GAL's are meeting with families, individuals commented that there are also

some who are not visiting with the children and their caregivers. Focus group participants stated that the GAL's who have not met the families tend to not be very knowledgeable of the children's needs. This has impacted the GAL's ability to reach an independent assessment regarding how the case should proceed. In addition, individuals expressed uncertainty with regard to parents' understanding of the court process when they do not have legal representation. It was noted that caseworkers and the Corporation Counsel do what they can to explain the process to parents, yet despite their great efforts, parents do not seem to be as clear about what is going on as when they have their own representation.

Another identified challenge to the system was Child Abuse Restraining Orders. Focus group participants stated that some parents seek restraining orders if they have safety concerns when their child is in the care of the other parent, even if the agency has determined that the concerns do not warrant formal involvement with child protective services. Individuals expressed concern that a decision, such as limiting or prohibiting contact between a parent and a child, can have a significant impact on the child and that the judge and GAL often do not have sufficient information to make a decision of this magnitude in one hearing. In some circumstances, the judge will request that the guardian ad litem (GAL) conduct an assessment of the concerns, yet individuals noted that the GAL's assessment is likely not as comprehensive as those completed by a CPS worker. Others were concerned that no mechanism was in place to monitor the family's situation following the hearing, whether the court granted or denied the restraining order, and focus group participants believed that families seeking help in this manner were likely in need of follow-up to offer resources and supports. In conclusion, individuals did not fault the Department for not working with these families, yet expressed a need to seek alternative strategies to address their needs and concerns.

Another identified challenge occurs when parents are involved in multiple courts (criminal, juvenile and/or family). Focus group participants noted that the different cases are not being heard before the same judge. This can result in confusion for the family, particularly if they are unrepresented. This also results in conflicting court orders. For example, the judge in the criminal court may issue an order prohibiting the parent's contact with the child, which could impact the court order in children's court that includes planning toward the child's reunification with that parent.

Focus group participants added that out-of-home care providers, such as foster parents and relative caregivers, tend to be absent for court hearings. In general, individuals noted that out-of-home care providers were not actively encouraged to attend hearings or provided an opportunity to voice their thoughts or concerns regarding the child(ren) in their home, either while in court or through other means, such as a letter. Participants viewed this as a challenge to the process as out-of-home caregivers often spend the most time with the child(ren) and can provide beneficial information regarding the child(ren)'s emotional status and overall functioning.

Lastly, focus group participants seemed to be unclear if the provisions required under the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) were being followed in CHIPS cases. In general,

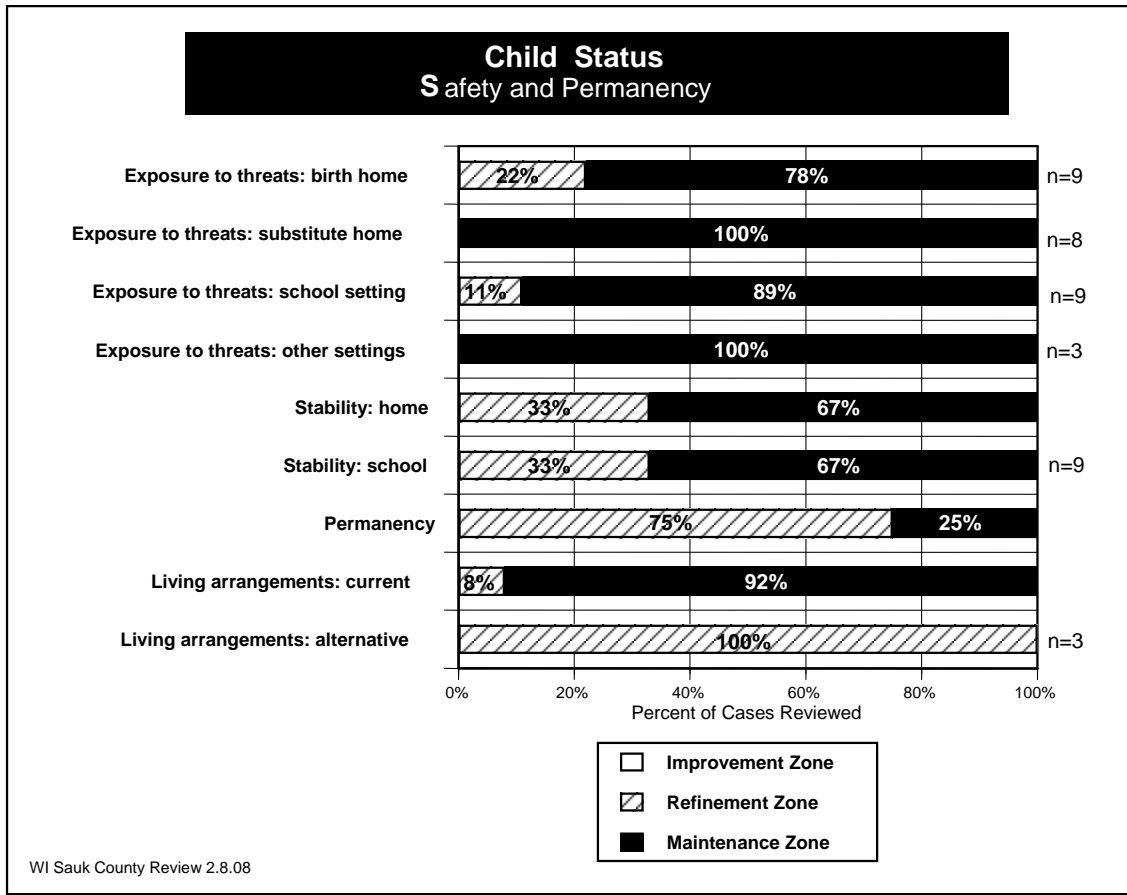
individuals appeared uncertain if conditions are being adhered to in compliance with ICWA. For example, questions were raised as to whether active effort findings were being made on the record and if a qualified expert witness was present during hearings to determine custody or the termination of parental rights. Whereas all of this is required under ICWA, individuals noted that some may not be aware of the requirements and thus, they may not always be followed.

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 13 indicators are presented in aggregate and graphic format on the following pages and measure the child and parent/caregiver status in the 180 days prior to the review.

| QSR Interpretative Guide for Child Status | | |
|---|---|---|
| <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> | <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> | <p>Acceptable Range: 4-6</p> |
| <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> | <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> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed #ccc;"/> <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> | |
| <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> | <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> | <p>Unacceptable Range: 1-3</p> |

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:

Overall, the children in the review sample are not being exposed to imminent threats of harm in their birth home, substitute home and school. The majority of the cases in the sample scored in the maintenance zone. Those cases that scored in the refinement zone according to the scoring method of the QSR also scored in the acceptable range according the scoring method of the Federal Children and Family Service Review (CFSR). As explained in the chart above, the QSR scoring system includes three scoring zones (maintenance, refinement and improvement) and the scoring system used by the CFSR includes only two (acceptable and unacceptable). Thus, all of the focus children were within the acceptable range and appear to be fairly safe from threats of harm.

The following example is from a case where the focus child scored in the refinement zone for *Exposure to Imminent Threats* while at school. “At school, [the focus child]

shows a minimally adequate to fair situation in being free from imminent threats. He has been physically aggressive with school staff. In addition, he struggles with peer interactions and his behaviors with peers may put him at risk of being harmed or threatened by a peer.”

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 this indicator, reviewers consider how stable the focus child’s home and school environments have been in the last 12 months, while further making a prediction as to how stable they will be in the 6 months following the review. Reviewers not only assess whether the child has experienced a physical disruption, such as an unexpected change in an out-of-home placement, but also whether the child’s relationships have and will remain consistent throughout this time. Again, this was an area in which the children in the review sample fared quite well, with 67 percent of the children scoring in the maintenance zone for stability in both the home and school environments.

In one case example, the focus child scored in the refinement zone for stability of her home environment and in the maintenance zone for stability of her school environment. Whereas the focus child experienced various disruptions in her out-of-home placement, those involved with focus child recognized the importance of keeping her in the same school and went to great effort to achieve this goal. As illustrated by the reviewer, “[The focus child] has had optimal stability in her school setting. She has been a student at her current school since kindergarten. Currently, she is in the eighth grade. She is very connected to her teachers and peers. In addition, she is very active in extracurricular activities, such as show choir and band. The agency was very sensitive to the fact that [the focus child]’s school was very important to her. They considered this as an important factor when considering her placement. Although her needs did not rise to the level of treatment foster care...the agency made the decision to place her at this home so she could maintain stability in her school setting.”

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:

Reviewers evaluate the permanency of every focus child in the review sample whether they are remaining in their birth home or are in out-of-home care, as the establishment of

permanency for a child can have a direct impact on a child's overall functioning. Three (25 percent) of the cases scored in the maintenance zone for permanency and the remaining nine (75 percent) scored in the refinement zone. One notable factor is that all of the children who rated in the maintenance zone are currently living in their birth home, while only one of the children who rated in the refinement zone for *Permanency* lived in their birth home at the time of the review. For one of the cases that scored in the maintenance zone, the family was receiving early intervention services and working with the county on a voluntary basis. The family faced many challenges, including a young child with developmental delays, a mother with a mental health disorder and social isolation. However, with the assistance and support of services, the parents have been able to be maintained the focus child in their home. As a result of their involvement with the agency, the parents have learned skills that have helped them establish safety and permanency for their child.

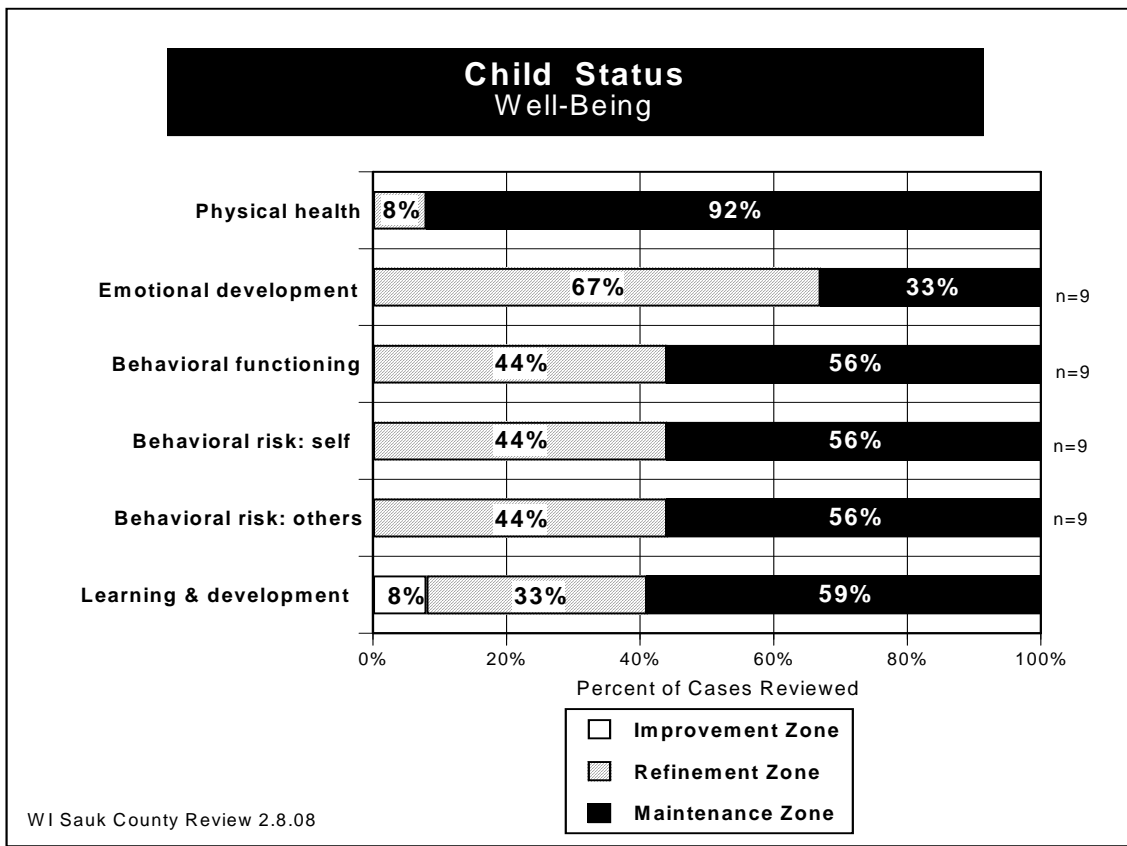
The children who rated in the refinement zone for permanency were in out-of-home care settings that included a treatment foster home, a county foster home, a kinship home or a residential treatment center. Reunification was the primary permanency goal for each of these cases.

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:

With regard to the focus child's living arrangement, reviewers consider both the child's current environment, as well as any alternative living arrangements where the child has slept or received care (e.g., unsupervised visitation with a parent) within the last 90 days prior to the review week. All of the children were rated for their current living arrangement with all but one of the cases (92 percent) rating in the maintenance zone. The scores indicate that the focus children in the review sample are in least restrictive living arrangements that allow for the continuance of relationships with their family and peers, as well as connection to community and culture. One of the reviewers described this in the following example: "[The focus child]'s home is a setting that substantially meets his needs. He lives in a safe home that is very child-friendly...His mother is very supportive of him and serves as a strong advocate. His mother was observed to be very nurturing of him."

Three of the cases were scored for alternative living arrangement. Each of the three cases that were rated for alternative living arrangement were in the refinement zone. For all three cases, the focus child's current living arrangement was an out-of-home placement and the alternative living arrangement was the focus child's birth 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:

All but one of the children in the review sample rated in the maintenance zone for physical health. This is consistent with the findings from previous counties who participated in the QSR. Overall, children in Wisconsin rate high in the area of physical health.

The one case that scored in the refinement zone for this indicator involved a young child who is medically fragile and requires consistent medical care and monitoring. Despite her short life expectancy, this child has "defied all the odds" that were against her. Thus, a rating in the refinement zone is impressive for this child and notes that she is accessing the appropriate medical care to address her significant needs.

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

Comments:

When assessing the focus child's emotional development, reviewers contemplate whether the child is functioning at his or her best attainable level of emotional well-being based on age, trauma history, diagnoses or other life experiences. Nine of the focus children in the review sample were rated for *Emotional Development*. Of those nine children, one-third (33 percent) scored in the maintenance zone, while the other two-thirds (67 percent) scored in the refinement zone. One child who rated in the refinement zone for *Emotional Development* was experiencing some challenges in coping with recent life adjustments. As noted by the reviewer, "[The focus child] has been showing signs of distress and has become somewhat withdrawn. The Father has recently reconnected with [the focus child] after being out of her life for eight years. It appears that she is struggling with him being back in her life and indicated to the reviewers that she does not want to see him. The Mother and other service providers noticed that [the focus child] has begun to withdraw and have responded by setting her up to meet with a counselor..." Moreover, the team recognized that the change in the focus child's emotional functioning was the result of the recent transitions in her life.

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

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:

The scores for *Behavioral Functioning* and *Behavior Risk* were the same for the cases in the review sample with 56 percent of cases scoring in the maintenance zone and 44 percent scoring in the refinement zone. Thus, a little more than half of the focus children are demonstrating appropriate behavioral functioning and pose little risk to themselves or others.

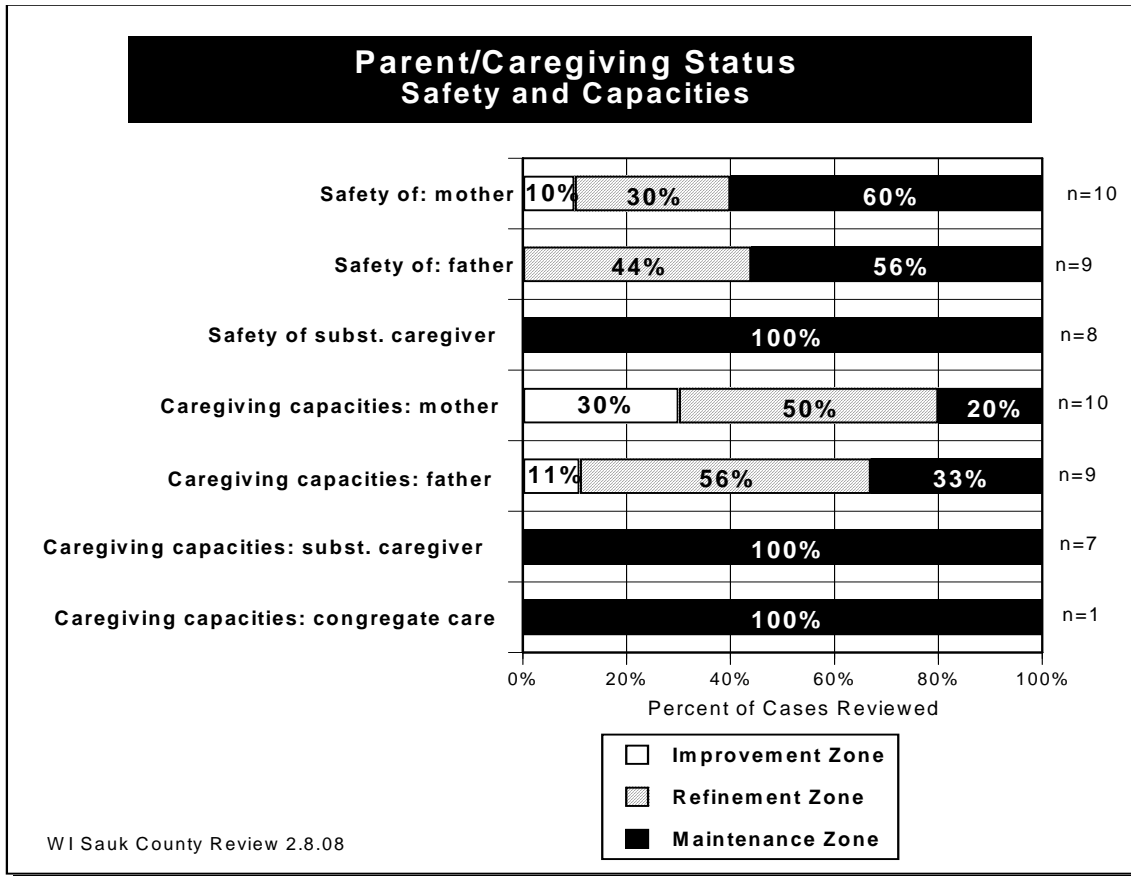
However, four of the nine focus children who were rated for behavioral functioning and risk exhibited some challenging behaviors. For example, one child had been reunified with his father and for the most part, was doing quite well, except in the areas of emotional and behavioral functioning. The reviewer noted, "...lately his behaviors have been intensifying. It was noted he does better in a structured setting at school and he has had some issues with bullying his peers. He has also recently been uncooperative with the school bus driver, has been spitting on other students and been caught tripping and pushing his peers. He can sometimes present as emotionally immature and this can manifest in baby talk."

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:

How a child is functioning in a school or early learning environment, both academically and behaviorally, can be an indication of what the child's situation is at home. While assessing the child's learning and development, reviewers consider the child's attendance and level to which the child is performing consistent with expectations based on the child's age and ability. Fifty-nine percent of the children in the review sample rated in the maintenance zone, while 33 percent rated in the refinement zone and 8 percent rated in the improvement zone. The one focus child who rated in the improvement zone had reportedly stopped attending the public high school in order to be home schooled; however, the focus child was not actively participating in either type of educational programming at the time of the review. Hence, the reviewers found this to be an area of improvement for this focus child.



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 mother, father and substitute caregiver were rated with regard to safety when applicable. Possible safety threats to the parent and/or caregiver may include concerns of domestic violence, living in a high crime community or participating in activities that put them at risk, such as selling street drugs. In the following example, the mother's choices had an adverse impact on her safety. The review noted, "As a child, [the mother] suffered repeated trauma starting at age seven related to sexual abuse, over time, by several of her mother's boyfriends...she tends to make unhealthy choices in relationships, especially with men and continues be exposed to further trauma related to domestic and sexual violence. For example, the mother’s current boyfriend is her mother's ex-husband and her own step-father. [The focus child]'s father was also a boyfriend of [the focus child]'s maternal grandmother at one time." This mother rated in the improvement zone.

For another case in the review sample, the mother's choices proved to have a positive impact on her own safety, as well as the safety of her child. "[The mother] recognized...that she 'had to push herself to do all possible to get her daughter back,'

which included filing for divorce from her husband. Her relationship with her husband proved to be extremely volatile and unsafe...The Mother is now in a relationship that appears to be free from harm and is actively working to protect herself and her daughter from any future harm." This example describes one of the mothers among the 60 percent who scored in the maintenance zone, while 30 percent scored in the refinement zone and 10 percent in the improvement zone. Furthermore, 56 percent of fathers scored in the maintenance zone with 44 percent in the refinement zone. All of the substitute caregivers who were rated scored in the maintenance zone.

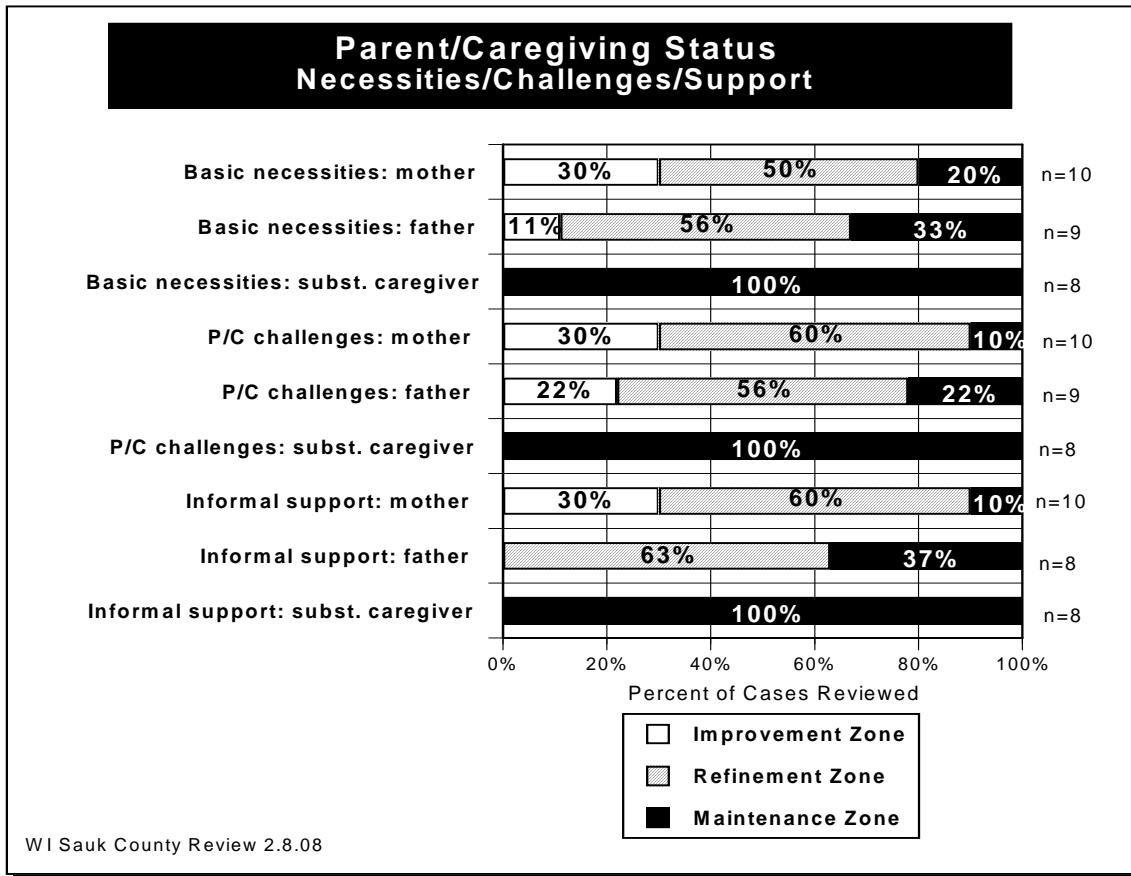
Caregiving Capacities (Home Settings): To what degree does the parent/caregiver demonstrate adequate caregiving capacities on a reliable daily basis commensurate with that required to provide the child(ren) with appropriate nurturance, guidance, protection, care, and supervision? If the child(ren) have 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:

Caregiving Capacities was an area where the mothers and fathers in the review sample may benefit from additional attention. Of the ten mothers who were rated, only two (20 percent) scored in the maintenance zone with 50 percent in the refinement zone and 30 percent in the improvement zone. The fathers in the review sample did not fare much better, with one-third (33 percent) rating in the maintenance zone, 56 percent in the refinement zone and 11 percent in the maintenance zone. Seven substitute caregivers and one congregate setting were rated in this area, with all rating in the maintenance zone for their ability to provide adequate guidance, supervision, nurturance and support to the children in their care.

For one case in the review sample, the reviewers rated the focus child's step-father, as he was the only father that the child had known. Although the step-father is no longer married to the focus child's mother, he remains the child's primary caretaker. The child is currently in out-of-home care with a permanency goal of reunification with the step-father. The step-father is described as "dedicated" to the focus child and open to making the necessary changes for the focus child to return to his home. Whereas the mother has shown little interest in being involved with the planning process, the step-father has been an active participant who has the focus child's best interests in mind. For this reason, reviewers scored this step-father in the maintenance zone for *Caregiving Capacities*.



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:

Basic Necessities is another area where mothers and fathers in the review sample were experiencing some challenges. Similar to *Caregiving Capacities*, only two (20 percent) of mothers scored in the maintenance zone, while 50 percent scored in the refinement zone and 30 percent in the improvement zone. One of the mothers who scored in the maintenance zone is unemployed; however, this is a two-parent household and they are able to provide for the focus child's basic needs with the father's income. According to the reviewer, "[The father] is described as the 'bread-winner' and 'supporter' of the family. The father works full-time outside the home, and has made it his mission to be able to meet whatever his family’s needs may be. Though at times the family struggles to make ends meet, the father ensures that all the bills get paid."

Overall, the fathers in the review sample are struggling to make ends meet for their families. One-third (33 percent) of the fathers in the review sample scored in the maintenance zone with 56 percent in the refinement zone and 11 percent in the improvement zone. Unlike the two-parent household described in the above example, there was another family where both parents rated in the improvement zone for this indicator. According to the reviewer, "The barriers for [the father] are employment and transportation. Because of no employment by either caregiver, the basic necessities for the children are marginal. The family is living off of the social security [the focus child] receives." For this family, the concerns with providing for the family's basic needs also influenced the focus child's stability, as their limited income was likely going to affect their ability to maintain their current housing.

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:

With this indicator, reviewers assess whether the parent and/or caregiver exhibits any special challenges that may have an adverse impact on their caregiver capacities. Reviewers also consider whether the parent and/or caregiver have access to supports that enhance their ability to safely provide for their child's needs despite the challenges that they face. One mother rated in the refinement zone for this area, yet may have rated lower if it were not for the support of her husband, who rated in the maintenance zone. According to reviewers, "All in-home service providers were concerned over the extent of the mother's depression; however, the therapist that is working for the mother reported that though there is some depression currently, she is functioning rather well...though there is some uncertainty regarding any future diagnosis on the focus child, [the mother] is prepared to hear and accept a diagnosis, which demonstrates her growth as a parent in that she is willing to overcome any future obstacles."

Overall, this was an area where many of the mothers and fathers in the review sample are challenged. Moreover, many of the parents struggle with various issues, including trauma exposure (92 percent), substance abuse/ addiction (58 percent) and mental illness (58 percent). One notable factor is that the only mother (10 percent) who rated in the maintenance zone does not experience any co-occurring conditions in addition to her involvement with the child welfare system. This mother also rated in the maintenance zone for *Informal Supports*, the area that will be described next. The remainder of the mothers scored in the refinement zone (60 percent) and the improvement zone (30 percent).

Nine fathers were rated for this indicator with 22 percent rating in the maintenance zone, 56 percent in the refinement zone and 22 percent in the improvement zone. All of the substitute caregivers (100 percent) scored in the maintenance zone.

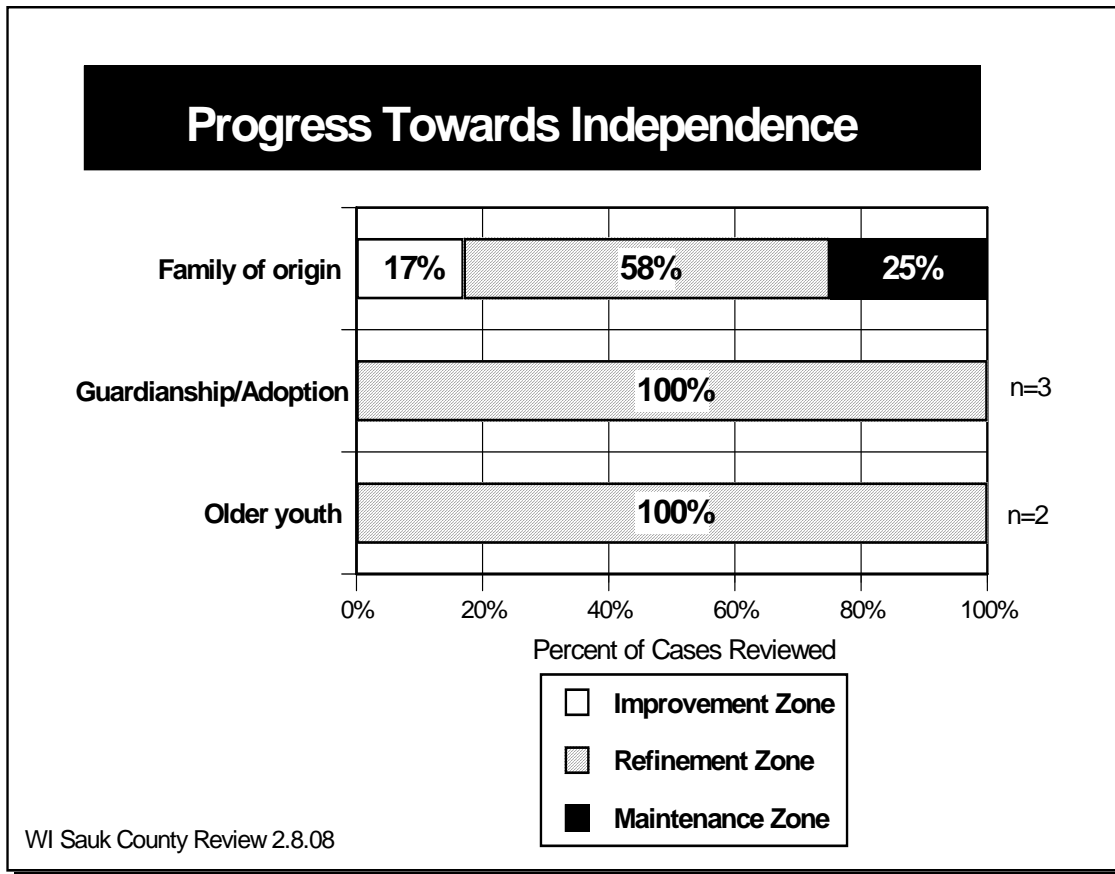
Informal Support System: To what degree is the family engaged with an informal support system that assists them with essential caregiving responsibilities? Do families having special needs children, recovery/relapse prevention plans, and/or family safety plans have adequate levels of informal support 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:

The scores for *Informal Support System* were quite similar to those in the previous indicator, *Special Parent/Caregiver Challenges*, especially for the mothers in the review sample. Mothers again rated with 10 percent in the maintenance zone, 60 percent in the refinement zone and 30 percent in the improvement zone. Fathers fared slightly better, with 37 percent rating in the maintenance zone and 63 percent in the refinement zone. One father who scored in the maintenance zone, "has excellent formal and informal supports. He currently has an AODA counselor and a probation officer that he recognizes as avenues for assistance. He has lots of family and friends in the area. The father plans to have his adult niece move into the new apartment with him. She will be able to help him parent the focus child and provide the necessary supervision when he is working the night shift."

Informal supports are a critical piece in the change process and in helping families to safely achieve independence from the agency. They are the individuals who help the family during times of need and often their support alone provides early intervention to CPS involvement. This was evident in the example provided above where those involved with the father, as well as the reviewers, felt confident that the father would continue to do well following case closure with the agency.

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:

Progress to Independence looks at whether the family has taken positive steps toward achieving independence from the agency. For eight of the cases, the children were in out-of-home care and the primary permanency goal for the focus child was reunification. For the other four cases, the child was already in the home and those involved with the family were working to keep the child in the biological home. All of the cases in the review sample were scored in this area, with 25 percent in the maintenance zone, 58 percent in the refinement zone and 17 percent in the improvement zone. As noted with the previous indicator, *Informal Supports*, a critical part of achieving independence is identifying the individuals who will remain in the life of the family once the agency is no

longer involved. This was evident in the following example from a case that scored in the refinement zone. "The mother has made some good progress: she is demonstrating appropriate parenting skills, has met fundamental living needs and has been described as highly motivated. The visitations are being increased while supervision is being reduced. The areas needing refinement are the development of an informal support network and plan for safe case closure, and ensuring that the entire team, including the foster mother, supports and works towards reunification." For this case, the primary permanency goal is reunification and the concurrent goal is adoption. This case scored in the refinement zone for both *Progress to Independence* and *Progress to Permanency*.

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:

Only three cases in the review sample had the concurrent goal of legal guardianship or adoption. All three of these cases scored in the refinement zone for the progress that had been made toward the concurrent goal. However, two of the cases were in the improvement zone for limited progress had been made toward the primary permanency goal of reunification. In one of the cases, the focus child is currently living in a foster family home that is also a pre-adoptive home. Whereas the goal remains reunification, the mother has made little progress toward this goal. As stated by the reviewer, "The required behavior changes that the parent(s) must demonstrate and sustain with respect to basic parenting skills and adult functioning in general, are not evident. In addition, sustainable conditions and supports must be established regarding housing and income." However, some progress has been made with regard to the concurrent goal of adoption, as the focus child has been placed in a pre-adoptive home and is currently placed with a biological sibling.

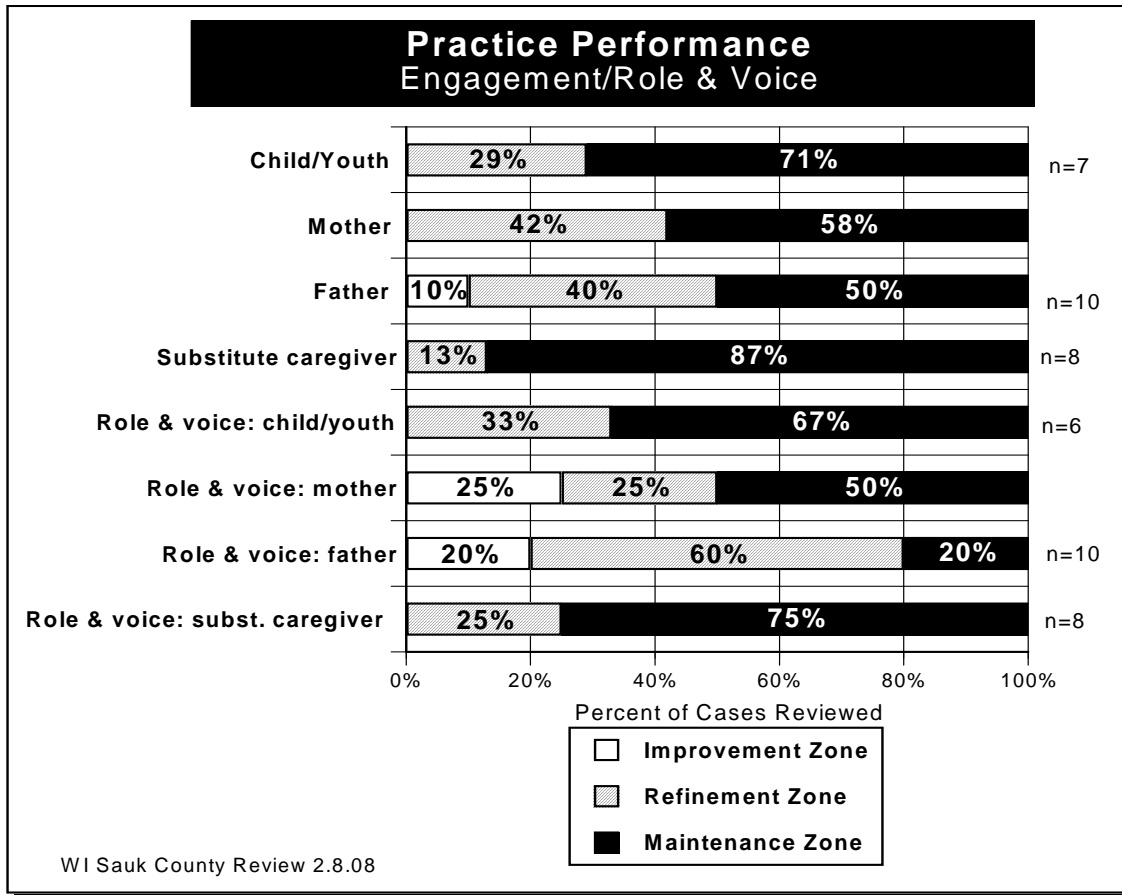
Progress to Independence (Older Youth): To what degree has the youth been making progress toward living safely and functioning successfully independent of agency services over the past six months? Is the youth demonstrating a developing ability to live safely and function successfully without outside 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:

Only two of the cases in the review sample were scored to assess the progress that has been made in providing resources and supports to older youth (15 and older). Of the two cases, both of them scored in the refinement zone. For one of the cases, the older youth continues to live at home and has learned some skills, as she is frequently called on to care for her younger siblings when her parents are away from the home. Although this has helped her learn to be responsible and to complete some basic household tasks, the experience has also had a negative impact on other factors, such as her academics, which has inhibited her progress toward achieving independence.

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 12 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.



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:

Engagement, along with the indicators that follow, describe what was learned about practice performance for the cases in the review sample. *Engagement* is the appropriate beginning to this section, as it is such a vital part of the change process. When a family is engaged in the process, successful efforts have been implemented for family members to develop a trust-based relationship with the agency worker and other professionals with whom they are working. Without engagement of the family, the team will struggle to implement the strategies and supports essential for the family to sustain the changes necessary to achieve permanency and safe case closure. Overall, this was an area in which the cases in the review sample did well, with at least 50 percent of the cases scoring in the maintenance zone for the focus child, the mother, the father and the substitute caregiver. Substitute caregivers fared the best, with 87 percent in the

maintenance zone and 13 percent in the refinement zone. The focus children in the review sample were also quite engaged with 71 percent scoring in the maintenance zone and 29 percent in the refinement zone. The scores for mothers and fathers in the review sample were also noteworthy. All of the mothers were rated, with 58 percent of the mothers rating in the maintenance zone and 42 percent in the refinement zone. Ten fathers were rated, with 50 percent scoring in the maintenance zone, 40 percent in the refinement zone and 10 percent in the improvement zone.

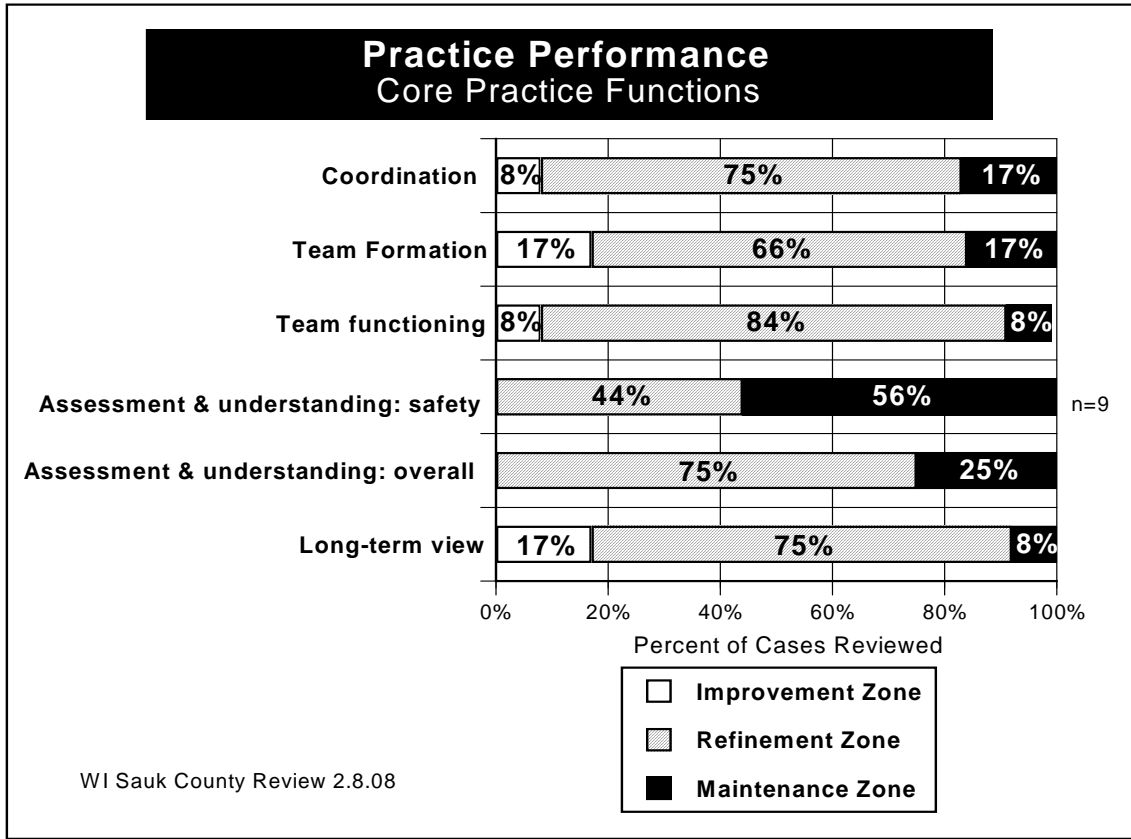
In the following example, the reviewer notes the importance not only of *Outreach and Engagement*, but also of *Role and Voice*, the next indicator to be described. The reviewer noted, "One area that was not only rated high, but was seen as monumental in moving the case forward was engagement and role and voice with the mother. The new team and the new caseworker did a great job of reaching out to this mother and encouraging her involvement in the change process. What makes this even more impressive is that this was accomplished under difficult circumstances (e.g., the mother's past negative experience with the Department) and the sudden shifts in the case plan due to the overturning of the [termination of parental rights] TPR. It's often very difficult to engage someone in services after they have had a bad experience but this team did it and did it well too." For this case, the mother rated in maintenance zone and the father and substitute caregiver rated in the refinement zone. The child was not rated due to his young age.

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:

While *Oureach and Engagement* is fundamental in successfully moving a family through the change process, *Role and Voice* provides the family with the opportunity to be an active participant in the process and to influence decisions made regarding their family. This was illustrated in the following case as noted by the reviewer, "The Mother is a full participant in the planning process. Initially, school personnel were recommending that [the focus child] be placed into a residential setting due to his behaviors. The Mother listened to the school's concerns and acknowledged that her son was in need of help. However, she did not like the residential options provided to her as either the facilities were too far away from her home or she thought that a state hospital setting was too scary to consider. The Mother's sister is a nurse at a local hospital and was able to connect the Mother with the hospital social worker. This worker then assisted the Mother in getting her son into the inpatient behavioral health unit." This case scored in the maintenance zone for *Role and Voice* of the mother. Overall, 50 percent of mothers rated in the maintenance zone, 25 rated in the refinement zone and 25 percent rated in the improvement zone.

Furthermore, the scores for the *Role and Voice* for focus child were favorable. Of the six children who were rated, two-thirds (67 percent) rated in the maintenance zone and one-third (33 percent) rated in the refinement zone. Substitute caregivers also fared well in this area. Of the eight who were rated, 75 percent rated in the maintenance zone and 25 in the refinement zone. The scores for fathers, however, were slightly lower for the ten who were rated for *Role and Voice*. Twenty percent rated in the maintenance zone, 60 percent rated in the refinement zone and the remaining 20 percent rated in the improvement zone.



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:

When assessing *Coordination*, the reviewers consider whether those involved have a single point of communication, facilitation and leadership with regard to decision-making and service provision for the family. Effective coordination requires communication across all parties to ensure the best possible outcomes for the family. For the most part, the cases in the review sample identified *Coordination* to be an area in need of some

enhancement, with 17 percent of cases scoring in the improvement zone, 75 percent in the refinement zone and 8 percent in the improvement zone.

In the following example, the various players were aware of who to contact with updates or questions; however, it appeared that they were unclear as to who was the leader or facilitator of the case. "This case originated in one county and venue was eventually changed to this agency. There have been a number of Social Worker changes over the life of this case. The family, and some team members, are not clear regarding the coordinator for the case. Some feel that the Social Work Supervisor is the leader during team meetings. Most team members will contact the assigned Ongoing Social Worker if they have questions or concerns between team meetings." This case scored in the refinement zone.

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 function that is intrinsic throughout the "best practice model" imbedded in the QSR. For the purpose of the QSR, teaming refers to collaborative decision-making, planning and assessing of the families strengths and needs. One notable factor of this collaborative is that the family is a critical member of the team, not only to provide necessary input on their family and weigh-in on decisions, but to identify individuals whom they feel should be on the team, including formal and informal supports. Thus, for the purpose of the review, teaming is evaluated on two different levels, formation and functioning.

The formation of a team can have an impact on the functioning or effectiveness of the team. According to one reviewer, "This team is also noteworthy for, among other things, its self-establishment that grew out of the need for closer collaboration. As a result, there seemed to be a sense of camaraderie and ownership that pervaded the planning process. Despite occasional differences of opinion, the team modeled for the family, and for each other, a sense of perseverance and a proactive stance in problem solving...[the focus child] was included in these and other team discussions to avoid the confusion that he can often generate. This kind of response is, of course, what [the focus child] needs and likely wants from those adults in charge of his well-being. It is possible that this was one of the few times in his life that adult differences led to a resolution in an important relationship instead of the dissolution of one."

However, in the next example, a comprehensive team has not been formed, impacting the planning process and the development of a long-term view. The reviewer noted, "[There] has been an absence of a team approach. Since the focus child was placed in the current foster home, there has been one staffing and neither parent was present. The Mother and her children were described as being a very unified and a close family and the children have stuck together. The family has many strengths that could be built upon by utilizing a teaming strategy. A team could help improve communication and coordination among the family and service providers." Moreover, this case scored in the improvement zone both for *Team Formation* and *Long-Term View for Safe Case Closure*.

Though the overall scores for both areas were similar, the scores for *Team Formation* fared slightly better than those for *Team Functioning*. For the former, 17 percent of cases scored in the maintenance zone, 66 percent in the refinement zone and 17 percent in the improvement zone. For the latter indicator, 8 percent (one case) scored in the maintenance zone, 84 percent in the refinement zone and 8 percent (one case) scored in the improvement zone.

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:

Assessment and Understanding of Safety was another area of strength among the cases in the review sample. Nine cases were identified by reviewers to be in need of having a safety assessment and of those nine cases, 56 percent scored in the maintenance zone with the remaining 44 percent in the refinement zone. Furthermore, 89 percent of these cases fell in the acceptable range (a score of 4 or higher) according to the Federal Child and Family Service Review (CFSR). One of the cases that scored in the maintenance zone provided an example of a comprehensive assessment and understanding of safety. The family had a long history of involvement with the agency due to concerns with both parent's substance abuse issues. The team was aware of the family's past, as well as how the mother's abuse of drugs and alcohol diminished the parental capacities that she sometimes presents during times of sobriety. As a result of the mother's incarceration, the focus child and her siblings were removed from her care. Family interactions continue to be supervised control for safety threats. Reviewers felt that safety threats were generally understood by those involved and that information regarding parental capacities was frequently updated and continually used to assess the child's safety.

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:

The establishment of a solid "big picture understanding" of the family's strengths, needs, risks and underlying issues is necessary in order to plan and implement the most effective strategies for the family to achieve safe case closure. Engagement of the family is an important precursor to gaining a comprehensive assessment and understanding of the family. Moreover, the development of a "big picture understanding" is just one of the benefits of a well formed and functioning team, which provides a venue for all participants to "get on the same page" regarding their knowledge of the family. Of the 25 percent (three) of cases that scored in the maintenance zone for *Assessment and Understanding: Overall*, these three cases also scored in the maintenance zone for *Outreach and Engagement* and two of the cases scored in the maintenance zone for *Teaming*. The remaining 75 percent of the cases scored in the refinement zone.

In the following example, the reviewer details how an incomplete assessment and understanding of a family's strengths, needs and risks could impact efforts to achieve favorable outcomes for the child and family. "Overall assessment and understanding was rated in the refinement zone. For the most part, this area was good, for example everyone was aware of the biological mother's history of domestic violence and her history of unstable and violent relationships. People were also aware of how these experiences have impacted mom's self-esteem, level of assertiveness and ability to choose healthy relationships. One area that seems to need further investigating is the mother's learning disability. No one knows for sure what the disability is or how it exactly manifests. Persons interviewed identified problems with processing information and focusing and managing multiple tasks. Thorough knowledge of biological mother's learning disability may be helpful in getting appropriate resources and designing a parenting plan that best fits her needs and challenges." Though a comprehensive evaluation of the mother had previously been conducted, questions remained with regard to the mother's functioning and parental capacities. Furthermore, this was an area that the county worker and supervisor acknowledged was in need of enhancement. At the time of the review, a request had been made for the mother to undergo another assessment, so that the team could gain a better understanding of how to effectively work with this mother to achieve positive outcomes for her and her family.

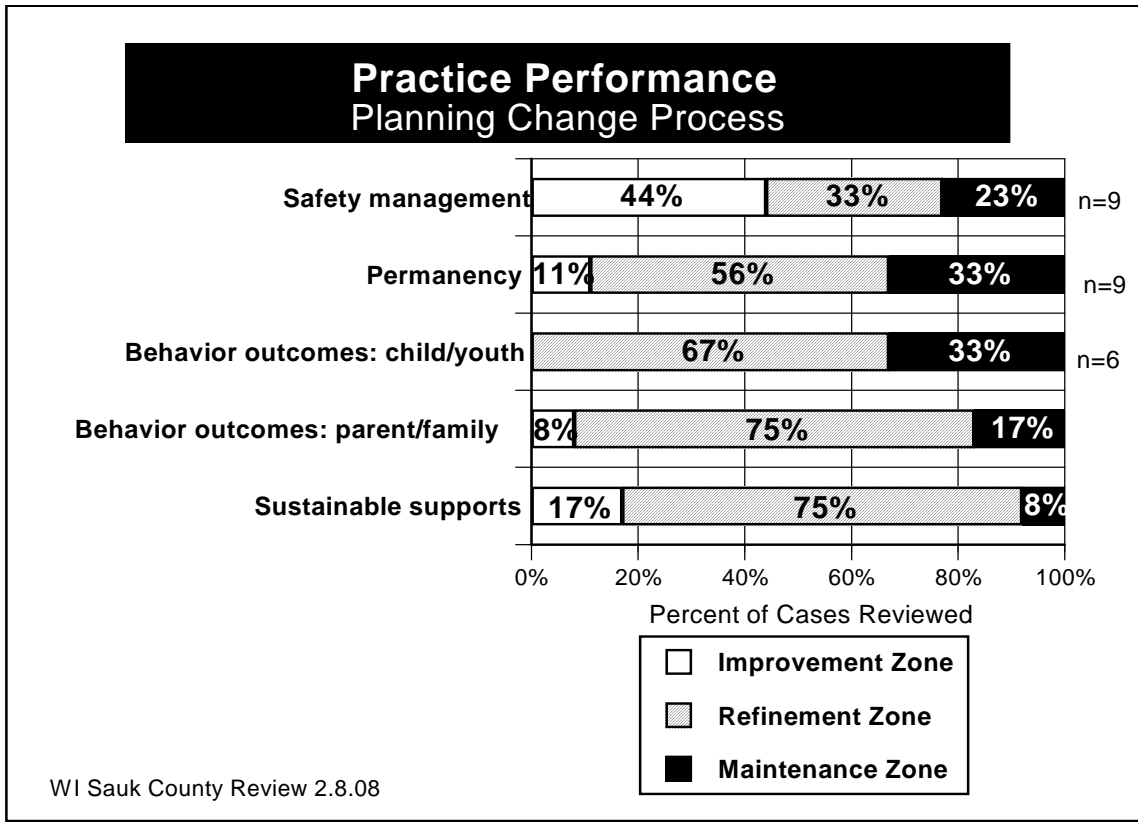
LONG-TERM VIEW FOR SAFE CASE CLOSURE: To what degree are there defined, understood, and agreed-upon conditions for Safe Case Closure that specify what: Protective provisions must be present in the home to keep children

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:

Prior to creating or implementing a plan of action to accomplish an outcome or goal, it is imperative to first determine what it would look like to reach this final destination. In the QSR, *Long-Term View for Safe Case Closure* allows the family and the rest of the team to develop a vision of what needs to occur to establish permanency and safety so that everyone involved, including the family, has a concrete understanding of what needs to occur before the family can be independent from the agency. Overall, this was an area where the agency may choose to focus some attention, as only one case (8 percent) from the review sample scored in the maintenance zone. Of the remaining 11 cases, 75 percent scored in the refinement zone and 17 percent scored in the improvement zone.

The families who become involved with CPS are often in crisis and have a difficult time looking any further than the present day. As a result, the focus of the team is frequently on "putting out fires" that can prove to be a distraction, even a barrier, to settling on what it would look like for the family to achieve independence from the agency. One reviewer illustrates this in the following example from a case that scored in the refinement zone: "Currently, the team is focused on crisis management and has reacted to the crisis behaviors of [the focus child]. But, the team has not planned for the necessary conditions for case closure. They have started to identify the supports that are needed, such as therapy, medication management, behavior management plan, and consistent parenting, but have not put together a plan of action to address what changes need to occur for case closure."



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:

Once the family team has established the *Long-Term View for Safe Case Closure*, they are better equipped to identify and implement the most effective strategies or plans to achieve the goals that would make this view a reality. This practice indicator, as well as the following indicators, assesses the strategies that have been created and implemented in order to help families make and sustain the changes necessary to achieve safe case closure. Each indicator addresses a different area of planning in the change process and this one assesses *Planning for Safety Management*.

Overall, this was identified as an area in need of improvement for the cases in the review sample. Nine cases were identified as needing either an in-home or out-of-home safety plan. Of these nine cases, 23 percent scored in the maintenance zone, 33 percent scored in the refinement zone and 44 percent scored in the improvement zone.

For one case that scored in the improvement zone for this area, the reviewers recognized that the team done a good assessment of safety that provided a clear understanding of the mother's diminished parental capacities and of the safety threats. However, concerns arose that the team had not taken the next step with this knowledge to create and implement a comprehensive safety plan. As illustrated in the story, "Reviewers felt that a safety plan or a discussion around safety planning had been absent. Reviewers also felt that due to the increase in unsupervised visits, including four day weekend visits, it is crucial that some sort of safety planning discussion take place immediately." Furthermore, the lack of planning around safety in this case also impacted the long-term view for safe case closure, an area that rated in the refinement zone.

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:

Nine cases were scored for this indicator. The reviewers only assess the planning that had been developed and implemented around the permanency of the focus children who had been placed in out-of-home care. Of the nine cases, one-third scored in the maintenance zone, while 56 percent scored in the refinement zone and 11 percent scored in the improvement zone. In general, the scores for *Planning a Change Process for Permanency* were similar to the scores for *Overall Progress to Permanency* where 25 percent scored in the maintenance zone and 75 percent scored in the refinement zone.

When developing a plan to achieve permanency, the team needs to reference the long-term view for the family, including which parental capacities need to be enhanced and what supports need to be in place, in order to create an effective plan to achieve reunification or if this is not possible, a concurrent permanency plan. The following example describes how a comprehensive plan can lead to positive outcomes for the child and family. The reviewer noted, "The county has done a good job of planning a change process of permanency in that relative caretakers were immediately identified for [the focus child] and he was able to remain in a familiar, culturally appropriate setting until his Father could parent him. It was also fortunate that the Father could move in with the relative caretaker upon his discharge from prison so he could learn the focus child's routines. This also provided for little disruption to the focus child." This case rated in the maintenance zone.

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:

Effective Planning for Behavioral Outcomes details which behaviors need to be changed, as well as the team will know when the desired behavioral outcome has been reached. Reviewers consider the planning that has been done for the parent(s), as well as the focus child, as appropriate. In this review sample, six of the focus children were scored, with one-third of the cases scoring in the maintenance zone and two-thirds in the refinement zone.

In one of the cases, the reviewers noted that some favorable steps had been made in planning for the focus child's behavioral outcomes. For example, "There is a great improvement in the focus child's behaviors. He feels as though he is making positive changes and getting his act together since he has been in the group home. The focus child is willing to learn and appears to be responding well to the level of interventions that have been implemented. Providers are committed to [the focus child]'s success and think he is capable of making the changes necessary to do well upon reaching the age of maturity." However, this case rated in the refinement zone, as much of the planning had been around behavioral changes in his current environment (out-of-home care). The reviewers noted that the team had not yet begun planning how the focus child would sustain these changes after the permanency goal of reunification was achieved. Thus, *Long-Term View for Safe Case Closure* was also impacted by the need for additional planning and rated in the improvement zone for this case.

For the parents in the review sample, 17 percent scored in the maintenance zone, 75 percent scored in the refinement zone and 8 percent scored in the improvement zone. Whereas some of the cases exhibited effective planning with regard to behavioral outcomes, the scores identify this as an area in which the agency may wish to address efforts to help families make and sustain the behavioral changes necessary to safely care for their child(ren). In the following example, the mother has been incarcerated for the majority of the few years prior to the review. This has affected her ability to participate in services to address the behaviors targeted for change in working toward the goal of reunification. The reviewer noted, "Planning for mother's behavioral outcomes has not produced desired results. One obvious challenge has been to coordinate any service delivery efforts at a distance and with limited direct access to mother. Under these circumstances, the team's plan hinged on mother participating and benefiting from the early release program that was cut short by her decision to stop participating. Anticipating the anxieties and/or her emotional limitations related to participating in

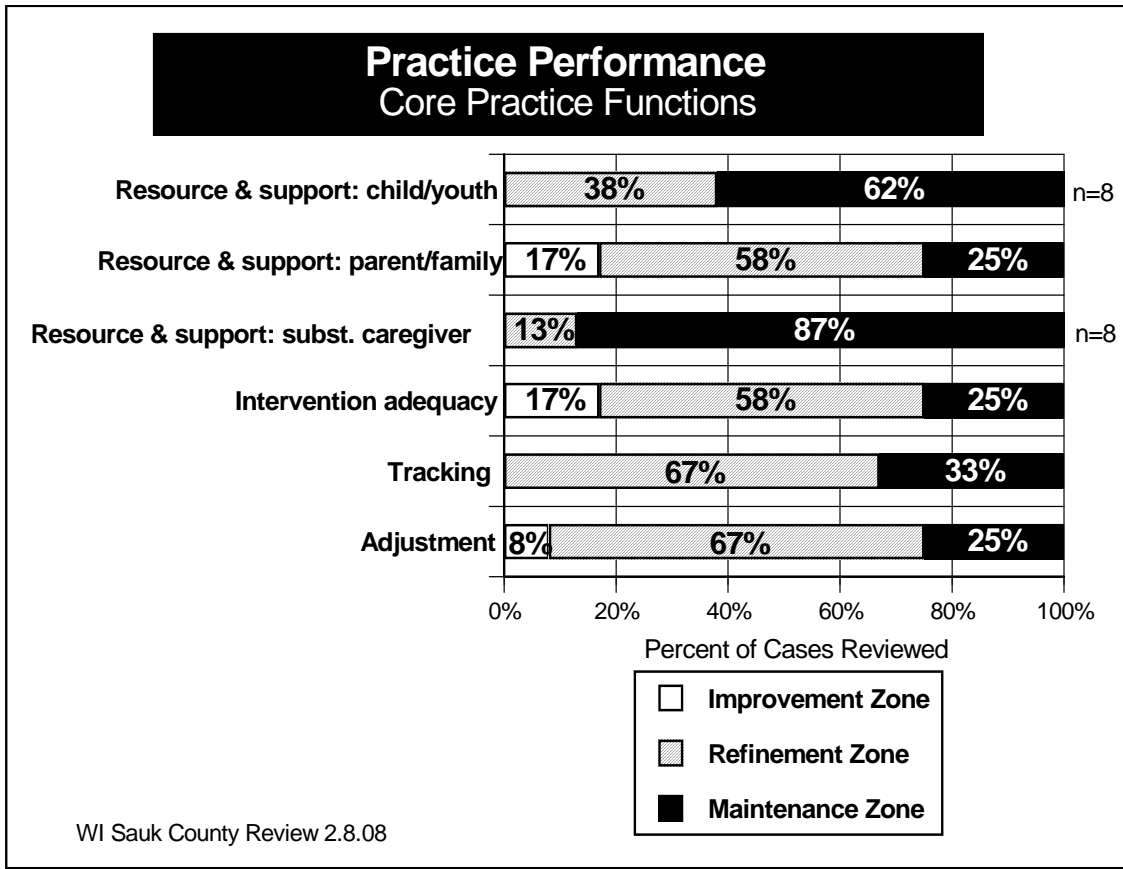
program would have been difficult, though in retrospect perhaps a closer collaboration with mother's prison social worker might have altered the course of events." Overall, the team has found planning for behavioral outcomes to be a challenge for this family, which was further evident in the scores for *Progress to Independence* that fell in the improvement zone.

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:

Informal supports are considered a necessary resource to assure that the family will remain independent from the agency following safe case closure. In general, the families that become involved with CPS are lacking positive supports whose presence may prevent CPS involvement or re-entry into the system once they achieve independence from the agency. Moreover, when families lack such healthy supports, the team is challenged to identify and implement potential strategies to assist the family in securing positive supports within their family, friends and community who will continue to provide the family assistance long after involvement with the agency has ended.

Similar to the area of *Informal Supports* in the Parent/Caregiver Status section of this report, *Planning a Change Process for Sustainable Supports* was identified as an area for improvement among the cases in the review sample. One case (8 percent) scored in the maintenance zone, while 74 percent scored in the refinement zone and 17 percent scored in the improvement zone. Sauk County is not unique; however, in its struggle to plan and secure sustainable supports for families following safe case closure. The combined scores from the first 13 counties reviewed using the current version of the protocol show similar results, with 15 percent of cases scored in the maintenance zone, 67 percent scored in the refinement zone and 18 percent scored in the improvement zone. In conclusion, this is an area that continues to challenge overall practice and subsequently, outcomes for children and families.



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:

The scores for *Resource and Support Use* were favorable for the focus children and substitute caregivers in the review sample. Eight cases were scored for each group and the majority of the cases scored in the maintenance zone, highlighting this as an area of strength. For substitute caregivers, 87 percent of the cases were in the maintenance zone and 13 percent in the refinement zone. Sixty-two percent of the focus children scored in the maintenance zone and 38 percent scored in the refinement zone. Moreover, 100 percent of the focus children scored within the acceptable range according to the Federal CFSR.

When evaluating resource and support use on a given case, reviewers consider not only the quality of the services and supports being implemented, but also the extent to which they provide the parents and/or caregiver what is needed to maintain a stable home for the child. In the following example, the focus child had significant health needs that on the surface could lead one to assume she would rate in the improvement zone. However, the team was successful in identifying and implementing supports that resulted in positive outcomes for this medically fragile child. According to the reviewer, "The quality and effectiveness of the services and care being provided to [the focus child] are excellent as evidenced by her continued improvements despite set backs. All service providers are committed to [the focus child]'s best interest and well-being. The agency has recognized that [the focus child] will need care throughout her life and have approved services through the Children's Waiver program." Furthermore, this focus child rated in the the high refinement zone for stability, as well as overall child status.

The scores for the parent/family did not fare as well as those for focus children and substitute caregivers. Twenty-five percent of parents scored in the maintenance zone, with 58 percent in the refinement zone and 17 percent in the improvement zone.

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:

A comprehensive assessment and understanding of the family's strengths and needs allows the team to identify and implement the best services, resources and supports to complement what is working well and enhance areas that are not working as well. However, the team also needs to consider how frequent the interventions are needed and how long they are necessary to accomplish the outcomes that are required to reach the goal of safe case closure. Twenty-five percent of the cases in the review sample rated in the maintenance zone, with 58 percent in the refinement zone and 17 percent in the improvement zone. One similarity worth noting is that these scores mirror the scores for *Resource and Support Use: Parent/Family*.

The team in one of the cases had the daunting task of "switching gears" during the planning process as the permanency goal had been TPR/Adoption, yet was changed to reunification after the TPR fell through. The reviewers commended the team for being able to engage the family despite the apparent challenges and create a plan that was at the level necessary to achieve permanency and safe case closure. According to the reviewer, "Intervention adequacy for change was rated as good...The services or resources put in place were of the right power, intensity and duration to meet the needs of the family." The strengths identified in this area were also a result of effective planning by the team.

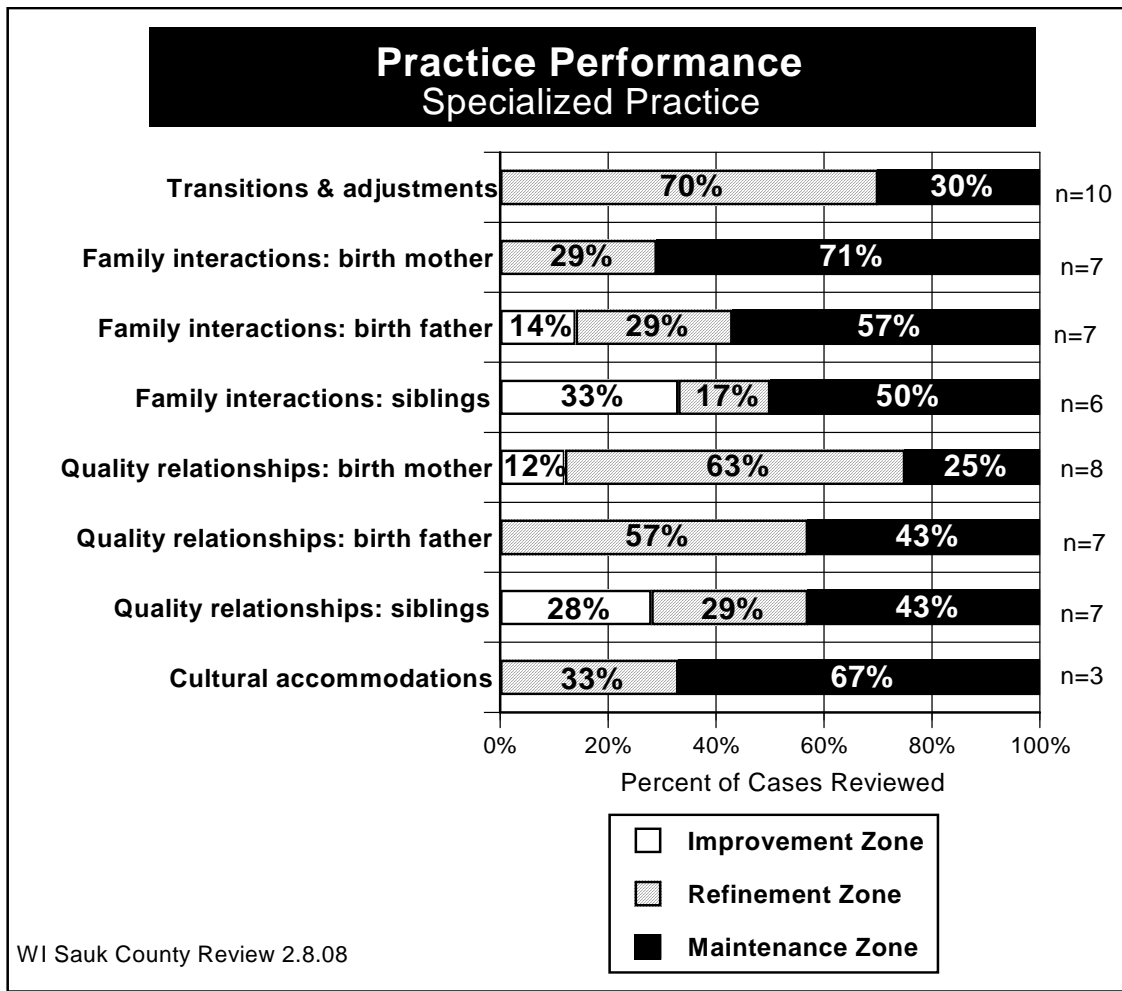
This case scored in the maintenance zone for this indicator, as well as for *Planning for Permanency* and *Resource and Support Use: Parent/Family*.

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:

The tracking of progress and adjustment of services when necessary are critical components that allow the team to determine what is working and what is not working for a family in their journey through the change process. Although they are scored separately, these indicators are not mutually exclusive and are reliant on each other in order to achieve positive outcomes for families. Although the scores for each area were similar, the scores for *Tracking* were somewhat higher than those for *Adjustment*. This indicates that while teams may be tracking progress in the case plan, adjustments are not necessarily being made based upon those assessments. For the former indicator, one-third (33 percent) of the cases scored in the maintenance zone, with two-thirds (67 percent) in the refinement zone. For the latter indicator, 25 percent scored in the maintenance zone, 67 percent in the refinement zone and 8 percent in the improvement zone.

For one of the cases in the review sample, the reviewers found there to be effective communication and monitoring of the family's circumstances among team members, yet noted a need for refinement in how the team responded to or modified the plan based on this information. The reviewer commented, "...In the area of tracking and adjustment, reviewers felt that the team demonstrated good situational awareness or 'tracking' but that adjusting to new information needed to be slightly refined. Two areas that came to the attention of reviewers were biological mother's struggles with managing her children in the community and the increase in team tension, particularly as progress has been made. As alluded to earlier, the team is aware of these issues, now it's just a matter of responding to this information in a thoughtful, strategic way." This case scored in the maintenance zone for *Tracking* and in the refinement zone for *Adjustment*.



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:

Reviewers identified 10 cases among the review sample in which the focus child experienced a transition and life adjustment within the six months leading up to the review or a transition is anticipated in the near future. Of these 10 cases, 30 percent rated in the maintenance zone and 70 percent rated in the refinement zone. The cases that rated in the refinement zone for this special practice performance indicator also rated in the refinement zone for *Team Functioning* and *Team Formation*. This indicates that the parties involved with the family may be lacking some opportunities to communicate openly about the family or child's situation, such as life transitions, and to collaboratively

make decisions on what strategies and supports are needed in order for the transition to run smoothly.

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:

Frequent interactions between children placed in out-of-home care and their birth parents and siblings is a key practice principle embedded in the QSR. In addition to frequency, it is also imperative for the interactions to be "normalized" for the child and their family members, such as in the family home if safe to do so rather than in a visitation room at the agency. Thus, reviewers consider not only how often the focus child has interactions with their mother, father and siblings, they also look at the strategies that have been implemented to creatively maintain the quality of the child's relationships with their parents and siblings. Examples could include playing recordings of the parent singing or reading a story for the child at bedtime or including the parent during an outing with the foster family. Continued, normalized interactions result in better outcomes for children, including permanency outcomes, which is a notable factor among the cases in the review sample, as the primary permanency goal for the cases is reunification.

In general, the cases in the review sample that were rated for *Family Interaction* illustrate some positives in this area. The majority of the cases rated in the maintenance zone for interactions for birth mother (71 percent) and birth father (57 percent). Twenty-nine percent of the cases scored in the refinement zone for *Family Interactions* for both birth mothers and birth fathers with an additional 14 percent in the improvement zone for birth fathers. For one case that scored in the maintenance zone for the birth mother and birth father, the foster parents were an integral part in initiating and maintaining the child's interactions with her mother and father. As described by the reviewer, "Since the focus child was placed in their home, the foster parents have had some type of daily contact with the birth parents, whether by phone or in person. The foster parents allowed the

Mother and Father to come to their home for supervised interaction with their child. At one point this was occurring up to three times per week in their home." In addition to these contacts, the mother was having extended overnight visits with the child.

The above case also scored in the maintenance zone for *Quality Relationships* with the mother and father. On the whole, the cases in the review sample fared better in *Family Interaction* than they did for *Quality Relationships*, particularly for birth mothers. Twenty-five percent scored in the maintenance zone compared to 71 percent for *Family Interactions*. Although efforts may have been made for the children in the review sample to maintain connections and interact with their mothers, additional focus is needed on developing strategies that strengthen the child's relationship with the parent. For fathers, 43 percent of cases were in the maintenance zone and 57 percent in the refinement zone.

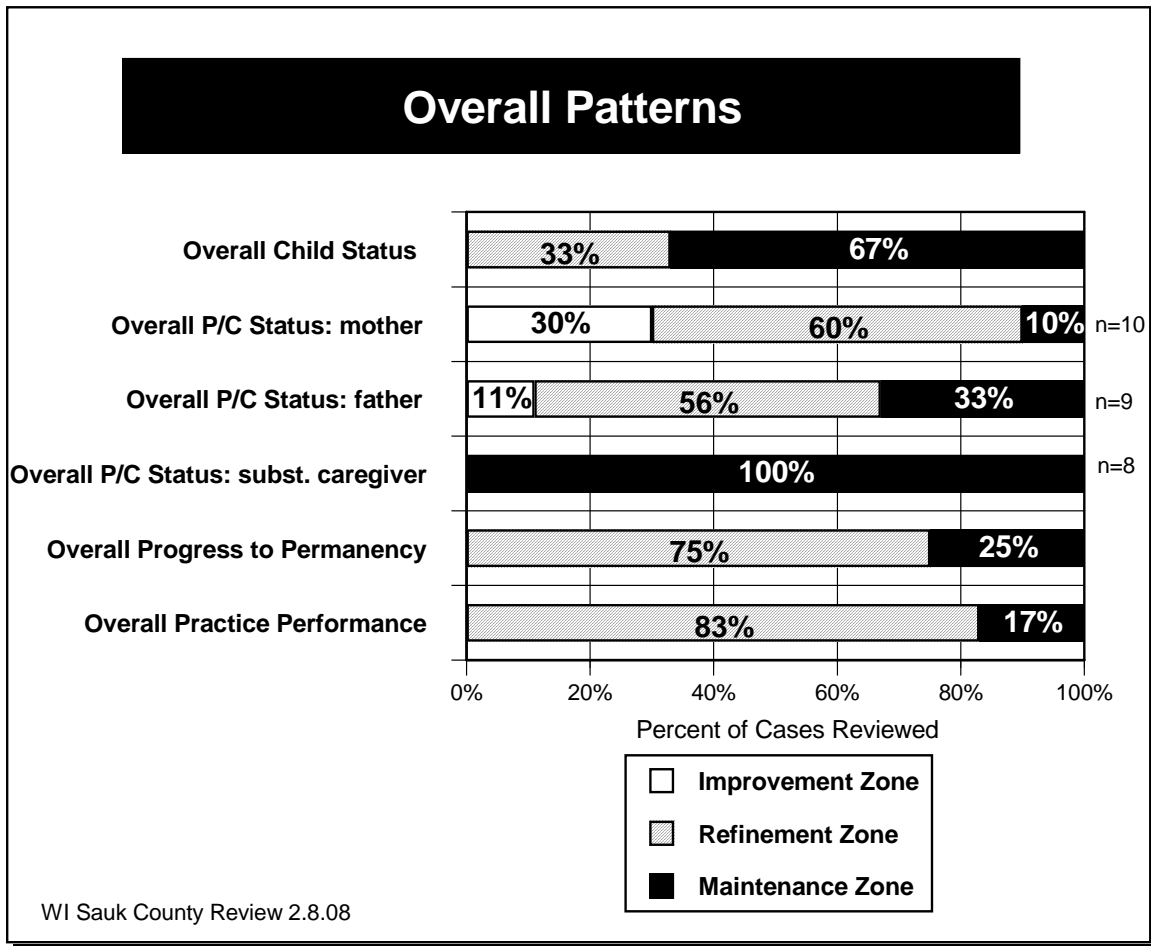
With regard to siblings, the cases that scored favorably were those where the focus child and the sibling(s) were in the same out-of-home placement. This was identified as a practice strength among focus group participants, who recognized the attempts the agency makes to place siblings in the same home when in out-of-home care. In general, sibling interaction and the quality of their relationships are areas in which counties who have participated in the QSR have struggled. For the first 13 counties that were rated in these areas with the current QSR protocol, the combined results show 38 percent of cases in the maintenance zone, 32 percent in the refinement zone and 30 percent in the improvement zone for sibling *Family Interaction*. Twenty-seven percent scored in the maintenance zone, 43 in the refinement zone and 31 percent in the improvement zone for *Quality Relationships*. The scores for cases in Sauk County's review sample fared slightly better than the combined scores. Because a child's interactions with his family and the quality of the relationships can have an impact on the child's stability and permanence, this will be an area where the agency will likely wish to continue their efforts to produce favorable outcomes.

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:

Three of the families in the review sample were identified as needing specialized accommodations to recognize and incorporate the family's culture throughout the change process. Of the three cases, two (67 percent) rated in the maintenance zone and one (33 percent) rated in the refinement zone. All three of the cases involved families who are American Indian. It was apparent that the tribal background of each of these families was acknowledged and efforts were made to identify and implement culturally sensitive resources and supports for each family. However, for the case that scored in the refinement zone, the reviewers believed that the family team was "aware" of the family's

culture, yet did not "honor" their culture when planning and implementing services for the family. The reviewers further felt that this had impacted their ability to engage the family in the change process and suggested that the team consider talking more with the parents about their cultural practices and include this as a regular agenda item at future team meetings. The inclusion of specialized cultural accommodations can lead to positive outcomes for children and families when implemented throughout the change process.



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 Sauk County. Agency staff identified the following as areas of potential focus for system and practice improvement:

- The addition of CPS staff and of a supervisor would allow workers to spend more time with families. Workers feel a need to have more time with families to better

understand family needs, support quality family interactions and improve the flow of cases transitioning from Initial Assessment to Ongoing services.

- Identify and implement strategies to improve communication and collaboration with the legal system when families are involved in multiple courts (criminal, family, juvenile, etc.).
- Seek out the assistance of community resources that could provide early intervention services with families before concerns arise that require CPS intervention.
- Increase efforts to engage incarcerated parents in the change process and improve partnership with law enforcement staff.
- Address identified gaps in service provision for younger children with significant behavioral needs and mental illness disorders, while continuing to work toward increased collaboration between the schools and CPS.
- Improve upon team decision-making to include the family and informal supports as integral members of the family's team.
- Work on establishing a long-term view of what needs to occur for the family to achieve safe case closure and focus planning strategies on behaviors must be sustained and supports need to be in place in order to achieve this goal. .
- Seek out and train volunteers to provide support to parents and families in the form of coaching and mentoring.
- Partner with the family resource facility to develop and implement strategies to create behaviorally specific goals to measure a parent's progress when participating in services, such as parenting groups.

The final “next steps” meeting of the review was used by the director, manager, supervisors, and agency leadership to begin to consider areas the agency would like to improve. State of Wisconsin Department of Children and Families CQI Section Chief Harry Hobbs outlined the post-QSR training and assistance that is available to the county. He also introduced Department of Children and Families sponsored facilitator, Jodee Grailer, who will aid in the county in the development and implementation of an action plan.

VIII. SUMMARY

The first Sauk County Quality Service Review identified many strengths in practice upon which the agency can build. *Outreach and Engagement* is often identified as an area for improvement, for mothers and fathers in particular. However, this was noted as an area of strength for the cases in Sauk County’s review sample. This is notable, as engagement

is a core practice value intrinsic in the QSR best practice model. It is also necessary in order to team with the family when develop and implement strategies to sustain the changes required to achieve safe case closure. Whereas family teaming, planning for a change process and developing a long term view were identified areas for further enhancement, the strong engagement that was evident in the review sample will provide a strong foundation from which the county can build upon and further achieve positive outcomes for their families.

The information gathered during Sauk County's first Quality Service Review is meant to be used as a baseline against which future practice can be measured. The agency is encouraged to adapt the QSR practice model in daily work with children and families. Along with the changes that will likely occur with the development of an action plan, improved outcomes for children and families with whom the system works should be seen as a result.