

Continuous Quality Improvement Quality Service Review

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

May 22 - 26, 2006

Washburn County Human Services

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

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

July 30, 2006

I. Introduction

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

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

The Continuous Quality Improvement Team conducted a Quality Service Review in Washburn County during the week of May 22 - 26, 2006. During the same week, staff from the Children's Court Initiative (CCI) conducted a review of the Juvenile Court. CCI is a comprehensive, ongoing, collaborative project designed to strengthen court processing in Chapter 48 cases.

II. The Washburn County Review

Reviewers

In the Washburn County review, four state employees [from CQI, Area Administration, and the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare (BMCW)] and three employees from other counties participated in reviewing the six cases selected. BMCW and county staff were observed and coached in their development as lead case reviewers. Area Administration staff served as a mentor/coach on one case. All the lead case reviewers who provided coaching have extensive experience in child welfare.

Case Sample

Six cases were randomly selected for review in Washburn County. In each case, one child was selected as the "focus child." Every attempt is made to stratify the case sample across workers, 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 Washburn review, a total of 49 persons were interviewed. Of the six cases, two children resided with their family of origin, two children resided in county licensed foster care, and two children resided in treatment foster homes. One child was in the 0-4 age range, one child in the 5-9 age range, two children were in the

10-13 age range, and two children were over the age of 13. There was an equal number of males and females in the sample.

Stakeholder Interviewers

As a compliment to the individual case reviews, focus groups were conducted with stakeholders from the local child welfare system. Site Leader and CQI Specialist Janet Poff conducted these sessions. In addition, Bridget Bauman of the Children's Court Initiative conducted sessions jointly with the Site Leader for many of the focus groups. The external perspectives that were gathered provide a valuable source of perspective, insight, and feedback about how all the systems families are involved with, interface and perform with the child welfare agency, thereby affecting and influencing outcomes. The stakeholder focus groups and their perspectives are briefly described next.

The Systemic Perspective (Macro View)

Strengths:

DHS Staff: The agency has a staff of skilled, competent, and committed workers. Workers are viewed by partners as dedicated and caring. The frontline staff and supervisor are also a close-knit group who support and value each other. Legal partners indicated that staff are generally knowledgeable and prepared for court.

Relationship with Service Providers: The agency enjoys positive relationships with service providers. Again, workers are seen as competent and caring by partners. There is good collaboration and open communication between staff and providers. The agency also has a positive relationship with local law enforcement agencies.

Service Array: Although Washburn is a small community, there are a number of resources available to serve the families with whom the agency works. Although as with any community there are service needs, the agency is generally able to maximize use of the resources available. In some cases, the agency is also able to access services in neighboring counties.

Court: The agency has generally good relationship with the court and district attorney's office. Workers feel they are given an opportunity to provide input in court and are respected. The Judge also gives parents, foster parents, and others an opportunity to be heard. As stated previously, workers are viewed as prepared and knowledgeable in court. The district attorney described open communication with agency workers and felt comfortable contacting workers to discuss concerns or ask questions.

Kinship Placements: Focus group participants indicated that the agency does a good job in placing children with relatives and supporting the placement. This was also borne out in the case stories.

System Challenges:

Educators: Although the agency's perception was that they had positive relationships with three of the four school districts in the county, it was apparent that there are challenges with all the school districts to some extent. There is a need for improved communication between the agency and the schools, especially in the area of education about the agency's role and responsibilities.

Tribal Relationship: The agency also is struggling in their relationship with the Lac Courte Orielles tribe. Communication is often challenging and there is role confusion between the agency and the tribe. There are efforts underway to address these issues and the tribal representatives who were interviewed indicated they have a positive

relationship with the agency supervisor, which should assist in facilitating a larger dialogue.

Workload: Caseloads are somewhat large and although workers have areas of specialization (i.e., Child Protection Initial Assessment and Ongoing, Juvenile Justice, Foster Care), overflow cases are sometimes assigned outside a worker's assigned area. Families coming into the system have significant needs and workers struggle to manage their caseloads. The agency has requested a casework position of the county board and if approved, this should help caseloads in the agency become more manageable.

Formal Teaming: Many focus group participants expressed a desire for more formal teaming of cases. There is an opportunity for the agency to expand the use of formal teams to help families in the change process.

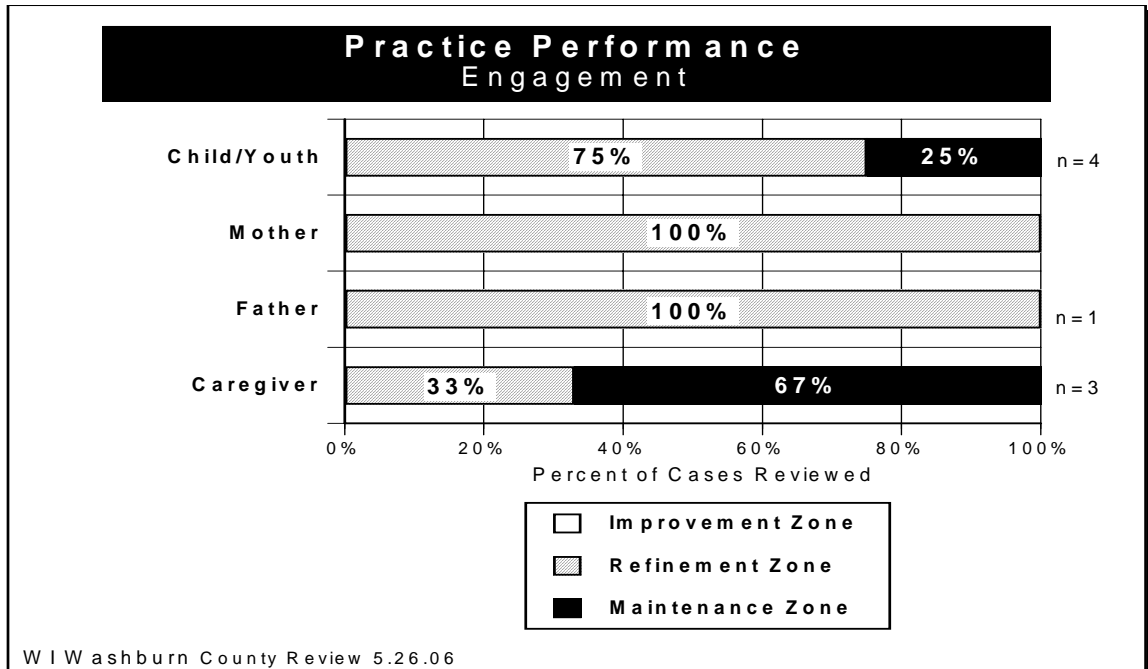
The Elements of Case Practice (The Micro View)

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 six cases that were reviewed. There is an ample body of research that documents their efficacy and contribution in helping families develop, pursue and complete successful strategies of change. The scores on practice performance are presented to point out opportunities where the agency can focus their efforts in improving outcomes for the children and families they serve.

Definitions of Scores:

- **Maintenance zone:** Favorable status, efforts should be made to maintain or build upon this practice element
- **Refinement zone:** Minimal or marginal status, further efforts are necessary to refine this practice element
- **Improvement zone:** Problematic status, opportunity for strategic plan to improve this practice element
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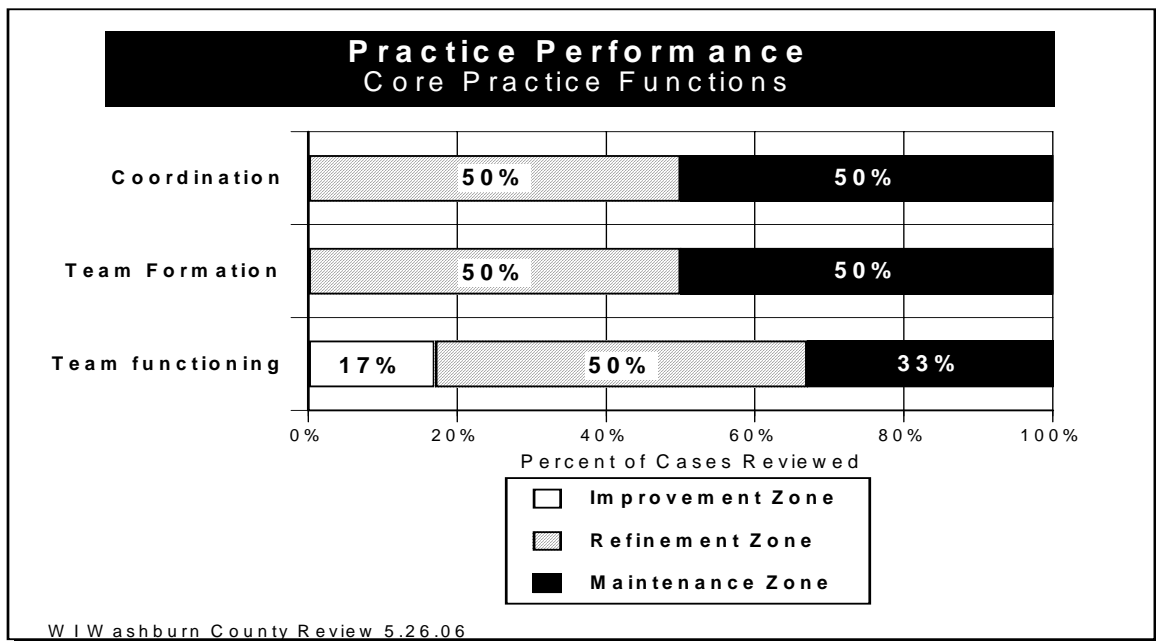
Note: n = (x) next to a bar in a graph signifies the number of cases meeting the specified criteria for the measurement. For some indicators, not all cases in the sample are scored.



ENGAGEMENT: [To what degree have the caseworker and other interveners involved with the family used engagement strategies, including special

accommodations with any difficult-to-reach family members, to increase family engagement and participation in the service process? Have they built a trust-based working relationship with the child, family, and/or others to support ongoing assessment, understanding, and service decisions? Have they built a mutually beneficial partnership with the child, family, and/or others to sustain their interest in and commitment to the change process?]

Comments: Engagement of families is critical in helping families successfully move through the change process. The scores in this indicator show there is a need for refinement in engaging children and parents in the change process. In one case where the score was high in this area, the reviewer noted in the case story that the worker and other providers “have done a good job of engaging our focus child and maternal aunt in the case process. The aunt feels that she is an equal member of the team and that team members value her opinions.” The agency might consider focusing on helping children and families be active participants in assessing for needs and planning and implementation of services in order to improve family engagement.



COORDINATION: [To what degree was a single point of coordination and leadership necessary for convening and facilitating effective family change planning and service decision processes used for this child and family? How effective was the coordination, integration, and continuity in the assessment, planning, organization, and provision of services to this child and family?]

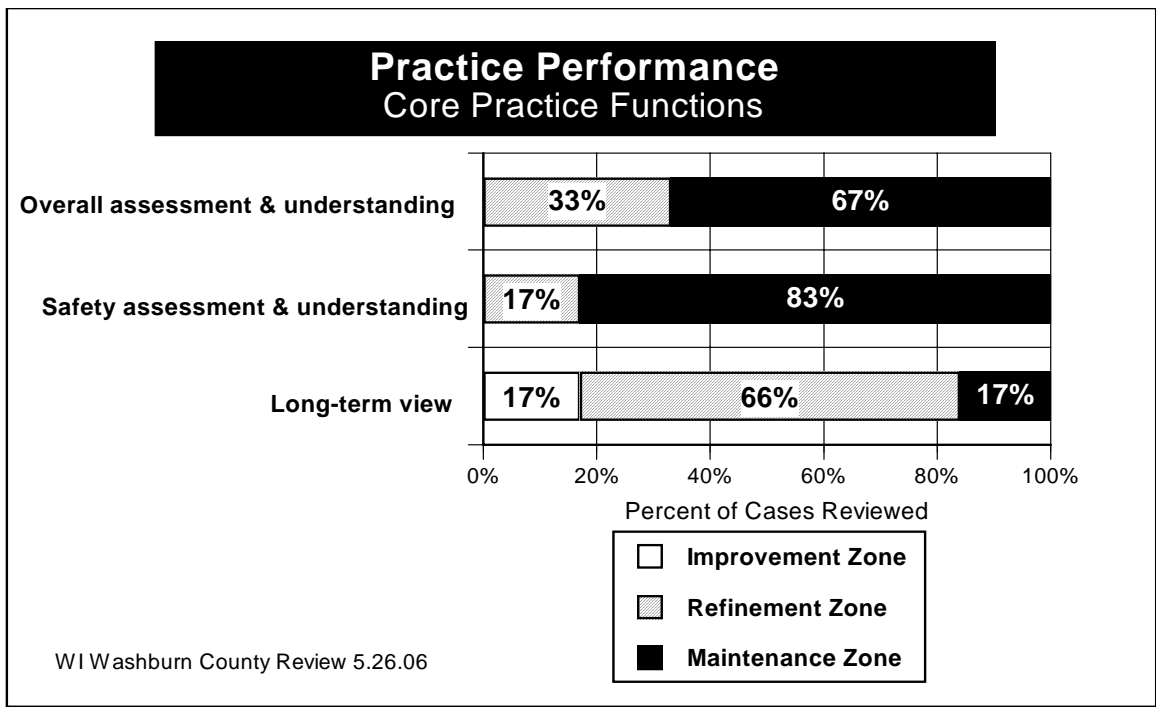
Comments: The agency is doing fairly well in having a single point of coordination in each case who effectively facilitates case activity. In one case reviewed, the family had a team of individuals working with them and the agency worker was viewed by all as “the

main point of coordination in the case.” None of the cases reviewed scored in the red or improvement zone.

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

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

Comments: The case stories indicate that teaming varies by worker and family and is not always a consistent element of case practice. In many of the cases reviewed, the people working with and supporting the family are already present in the case. There is a need to have more formal teaming in order to benefit the children and families with whom the agency works. In one case in which there had been a recent transition and new team members were present, the reviewer stated in the case story, “Those involved do not appear to have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities...Lack of clarification has caused frustration and has limited the effectiveness of team members.”



OVERALL ASSESSMENT & UNDERSTANDING: [To what degree was there a shared big picture understanding of the child and family’s strengths, needs,

risks, and underlying issues that must change for the child to live safely and permanently with the family of origin, guardian, or adoptive family independent of agency supervision? Were these understandings used in the family change process to help the family achieve safety, permanency, and well-being (via protective provisions in the home, demonstrated behavioral, emotional, and cognitive changes)?]

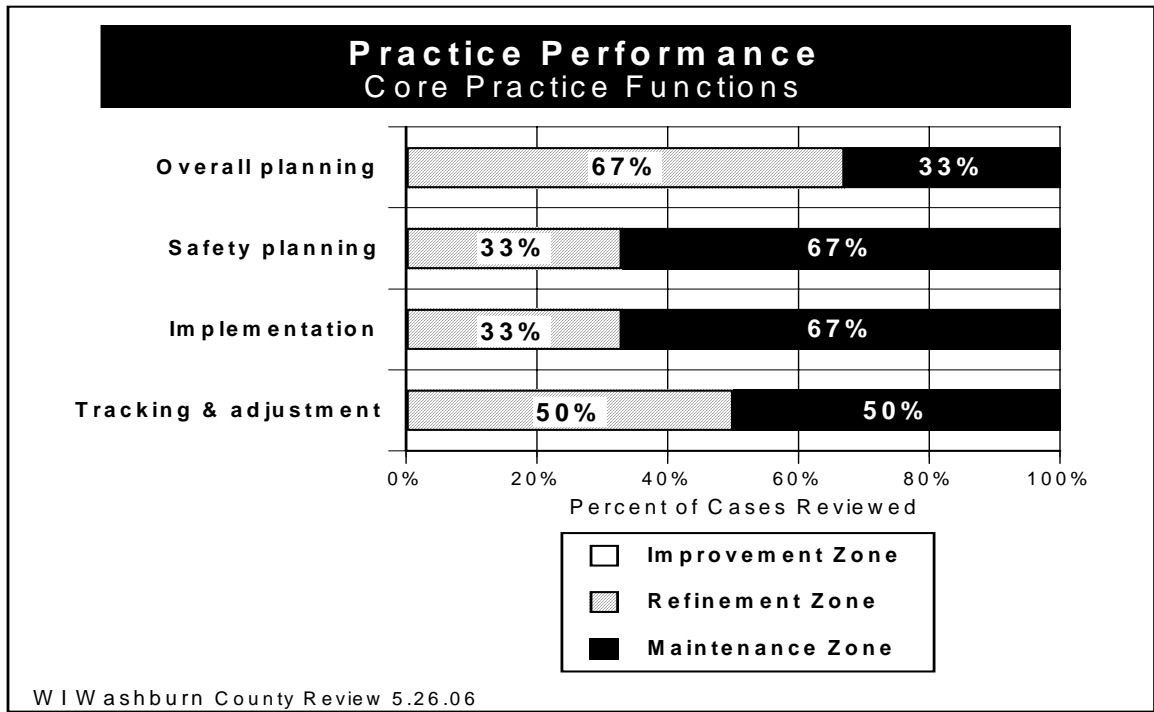
SAFETY ASSESSMENT AND UNDERSTANDING: [To what degree was there a shared big picture understanding of the child and family’s strengths, needs, risks, and underlying issues that must change for the child to live safely and permanently with the family of origin, guardian, or adoptive family? Were these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

Comments: In 67% of the case stories, Overall Assessment and Understanding scored in the green zone, or maintenance range, while the other 33% scored in the yellow, or refinement zone. For the most part, there is a shared “big picture” understanding of families’ underlying strengths and needs. In one case story in particular the reviewer wrote, “The reviewers noted that one of the strengths of this agency is the emphasis on assessment and evaluation as a basis for providing services.”

Similarly, the scores show that assessing for safety is also a strength in the agency. It was apparent through the case stories that agency workers have a good understanding of safety and are accurately assessing underlying safety issues.

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

Comments: This indicator measures how the child, parent, and family team will know when they are “done” with the service process and the agency can safely move to case closure. Development of a long-term view is dependent on a well-functioning team and functional assessment. The scores in this area indicate the agency has an opportunity to enhance case practice regarding long-term view. In one case that did not score well in long-term view, the reviewer indicated that “there is no shared understanding of what the child and her family will look like in the future. There is no clear indication as to how team members will know when the case can be closed or even what needs to be done to proceed toward case closure. Without a clear end in view, it is difficult to determine which services or supports will be best.”



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

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

Comments: Based on the scores in overall planning, this is an area of opportunity for the agency in which to refine practice. Planning is based on a functional assessment of families' strengths, needs, and underlying issues. Since scores in overall assessment were positive, the agency has a strong base on which to build overall planning. One story

illustrates the positive correlation between assessment and planning and implementation of services. The case story reads, “The reviewers noted that one of the strengths of this agency is the emphasis on assessment and evaluation as a basis for providing services. The agency is committed to providing the necessary services to this family and, more importantly, joining with the family to plan and coordinate these services.”

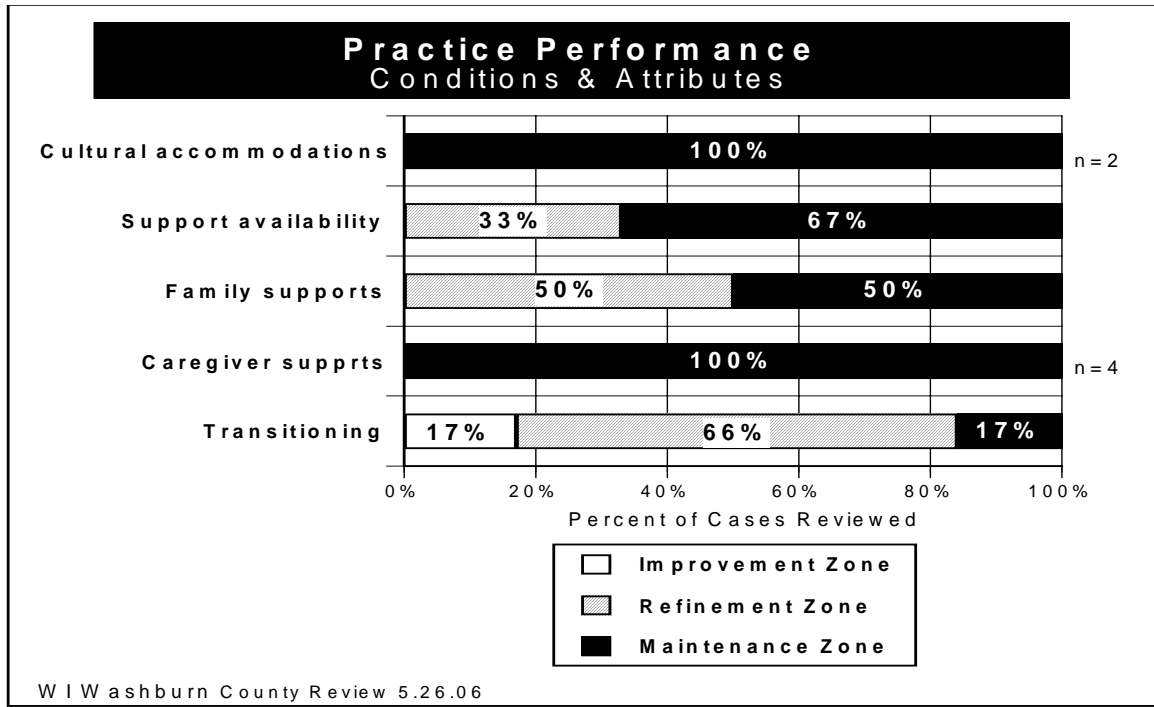
The agency is performing fairly well in the area of safety planning. Again, Washburn County workers have a good understanding of safety and use safety assessments in planning for families.

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

Comments: Scores in this area also indicate the agency is performing fairly well in implementation of services, particularly in those cases reviewed where the scores in planning were also higher. One case story in which the score was high in this indicator noted that the agency was creative in finding and implementing services to benefit the family.

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

Comments: 50% of the cases reviewed scored in the maintenance zone in this indicator and 50% scored in the refinement zone. There appears to be a correlation between the scores in this area and scores in the teaming indicators. As the agency moves toward more formal teaming for families, the process of evaluating and modifying plans based on progress and changing needs should improve.



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

Comments: Of the two cases scored in this area, both were in the maintenance zone. Although the focus groups indicate the agency has an opportunity to improve relationships with the tribe, the case stories indicate that the agency workers are doing well in being respectful of families’ culture in daily case practice.

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

Comments: Support availability was seen as a strength in 67% of cases reviewed and no cases were found to be in the red or improvement zone. Although Washburn County is relatively small, there are resources available to assist families in moving through the change process. This was evident in the focus groups and individual case reviews.

FAMILY/CAREGIVER SUPPORTS: [To what degree was the family or out-of-home caregiver provided with the training, in-home support, supervision, resources, support-development assistance, and relief necessary to provide a safe and stable living arrangement for the child that meets the child’s daily care, development, and parenting needs?]

Comments: While there is room for refinement in the agency’s provision of support to families, all cases in which the child was placed in foster care or kinship care scored in the maintenance zone in this area. In one out-of-home case that scored high, the reviewer noted in the case story, “Her current placement seems most appropriate to meet her needs as the treatment foster parent is skilled and trained to meet the needs of a child with Reactive Attachment Disorder.”

Helping families build an informal network of support is crucial in enabling the family to sustain positive changes after the agency is no longer involved. In a case story example where there was a lack of informal support for the family, the reviewer wrote, “It appeared to reviewers that there was a lack of consistent natural supports involved with our focus child and her family of origin. At the time of the review, our focus child and her aunt were the only participants not hired to be involved in the case.”

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

Comments: Scores in this area were mainly in the refinement zone, with one case rated in the maintenance zone and one in the improvement zone. Planning for transitions is another key element of case practice. When stressors caused by transitions can be anticipated and plans made to address these stressors, the family can be more successful in moving through life transitions. One case story illustrated the importance of transition planning for a child whose living situation was changing, but interveners were unsure where the child would actually be living. The reviewer wrote, “There was a lack of consistency from team members regarding the future of this child. The foster parents will be moving by July 1, 2006. There are numerous ideas regarding where the focus child will be living on July 1. This does not allow for any type of transition plan to his next home, wherever that may be.”

SUMMARY

The results of Washburn County's first Quality Service Review show that the agency has many strengths in case practice upon which to build. Most notably, strengths were seen in the areas of Safety Assessment and Understanding, Safety Planning, Implementation, Cultural Accommodations, and Caregiver Supports. Few scores fell into the red, or maintenance zone. The scores from this review are meant to serve as a baseline to be used to measure progress. 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 Washburn County. The final "next steps" meeting of the review was used by staff to identify areas in which the agency should first focus on improving.

The county is also encouraged to adapt the QSR practice model in daily work with children and families. Along with the changes that will most likely occur as a result of action planning, it is hoped that improved outcomes for children and families will be seen as a result.