

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Rhode Island Child and Family Services Review September 2010**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This document presents a summary of the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Rhode Island. The CFSR is the Federal Government's program for assessing the performance of State child welfare agencies with regard to achieving positive outcomes for children and families. It is authorized by the Social Security Amendments of 1994 requiring that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) promulgate regulations for reviews of State child and family services programs under titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. The CFSR is implemented by the Children's Bureau of the Administration for Children and Families within HHS.

The Rhode Island CFSR was conducted the week of April 26, 2010. The period under review for the onsite case review process was from April 1, 2009, through April 30, 2010. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)
- The State Data Profile, prepared by the Children's Bureau, which provides the State's child welfare data for the 12-month CFSR target period ending March 31, 2009
- Reviews of 65 cases (40 foster care and 25 in-home services cases) at three sites: 17 cases in Bristol (Region 2), 17 cases in North Kingstown (Region 3), and 31 cases in Providence (Region 1)
- Interviews and focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to, children, youth, parents, foster and adoptive parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, child advocates, Tribal representatives, and attorneys

#### **Background Information**

The CFSR assesses State performance with regard to its substantial conformity with seven child and family outcomes and seven systemic factors. For the outcome assessments, each outcome incorporates one or more of the 23 items included in the review, and each item is rated as a Strength or Area Needing Improvement based on the results of the case reviews. An item is assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent or more of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength. The evaluation options for these outcomes are "substantially achieved," "partially achieved," or "not achieved." For a State to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, 95 percent or more of the cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome. Two outcomes—Safety Outcome 1 and Permanency Outcome 1—also are evaluated based on State performance with regard to six national

data indicators. For a State to be in substantial conformity with these outcomes, both the national standards for each data indicator and the case review requirements must be met.

There are 22 items that are considered in assessing the State’s substantial conformity with the seven systemic factors. Each item reflects a key Federal program requirement relevant to the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) for that systemic factor. An item is rated as a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement based on whether State performance on the item meets the Federal program requirements. A determination of the rating is based on information provided in the Statewide Assessment and from interviews with stakeholders held during the onsite CFSR. Additional information may come from other Federal reports or assessments.

Overall performance on each systemic factor is based on the ratings for the individual items incorporated in the systemic factor. For any given systemic factor, a State is rated as being either “in substantial conformity” with that factor (a score of 3 or 4) or “not in substantial conformity” with that factor (a score of 1 or 2). Specific requirements for each rating are shown in the table below.

### Rating the Systemic Factor

| Not in Substantial Conformity                         |  | In Substantial Conformity  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| 1   | 2  | 3  | 4  |
| None of the CFSP or program requirements is in place. | Some or all of the CFSP or program requirements are in place, but more than one of the requirements fail to function as described in each requirement. | All of the CFSP or program requirements are in place, and no more than one of the requirements fails to function as described in each requirement. | All of the CFSP or program requirements are in place and functioning as described in each requirement. |

A State that is not in substantial conformity with a particular outcome or systemic factor must develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan to address the areas of concern associated with that outcome or systemic factor.

Because many changes were made in the CFSR process based on lessons learned during the first round and in response to feedback from the child welfare field, a State’s performance in the second round of the CFSR is not directly comparable to its performance in the first round. Key changes in the process that make comparing performance difficult across reviews are the following:

- An increase in the sample size from 50 to 65 cases
- Stratification of the sample to ensure a minimum number of cases in key program areas, resulting in variations in the number of cases relevant for specific outcomes and items
- Changes in criteria for specific items to increase consistency and to ensure an assessment of critical areas such as child welfare agency efforts to involve noncustodial parents

The specific findings regarding the State's performance on safety and permanency outcomes are presented in table 1 at the end of the Executive Summary. Findings regarding well-being outcomes are presented in table 2. Table 3 presents the State's performance with regard to the seven systemic factors assessed through the CFSR. In the following sections, key findings are summarized for each outcome and systemic factor. Information also is provided about the State's performance on each outcome and systemic factor during the Federal fiscal year 2004 CFSR.

### **Key CFSR Findings Regarding Outcomes**

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with any of the seven CFSR outcomes during the 2010 CFSR. The State did achieve overall ratings of Strength for the following individual items:

- Timeliness of investigations (item 1)
- Repeat maltreatment (item 2)
- Proximity of placement (item 11)
- Physical health of child (item 22)

The State met the national standards for the data indicators pertaining to timeliness of adoptions and permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods.

Although the State's performance on Safety Outcome 1 (Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect) and Well-Being Outcome 2 (Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs) did not meet the required 95-percent level for substantial conformity, performance on these outcomes was fairly high; the outcomes were substantially achieved in 91.3 percent and 87.0 percent, respectively, of the cases. In addition, although the State's performance on the items pertaining to placement with siblings and addressing the educational needs children did not reach the 90-percent level required for an overall rating of Strength, at least 89 percent and 87 percent, respectively, of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for these items.

In addition to these positive CFSR findings, HHS acknowledges the hard work and progress of Rhode Island in making positive changes in both its practice and operations to better serve children and families. Rhode Island DCYF has strong leadership that has been instrumental in effecting significant change since the first round CFSR. The DCYF director has established a clear and consistent vision for how DCYF will engage and support families and work collaboratively with stakeholders toward positive outcomes in safety, permanency, and well-being for children. This collaboration is demonstrated through Permanency Support Teams and the Real Connections program, which are innovative efforts identified during the 2010 CFSR as contributing to greater permanency for children.

Evidence of community engagement also can be seen in the State's approach to the development of the CFSP, coleadership of the Child Welfare Advisory Committee, and a stronger working relationship between DCYF and the Family Court than existed at the time

of the 2004 CFSR. The DCYF and Family Court partnership should serve as a strong foundation for addressing barriers to safety and permanency for children as identified by the 2010 CFSR. Furthermore, DCYF has made tremendous strides in its use of data and quality assurance (QA) results to inform decision-making and practice change. Finally, although not yet fully developed, the State has invested a great deal of time and resources in, and has worked diligently toward, the development of an integrated system of care intended to transform service delivery for children and families.

The CFSR also identified the following key concerns with regard to the State's performance in achieving the desired outcomes for children and families:

- Safety Outcome 2 (Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate) was substantially achieved in 47.7 percent of the applicable cases.
- Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations) was substantially achieved in 35.0 percent of the applicable cases.
- Well-Being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs) was substantially achieved in 20.0 percent of the applicable cases.
- Item 9, pertaining to adoption, was rated as a Strength in 30 percent of the applicable cases.
- Item 10, pertaining to other planned permanent living arrangement (OPPLA), was rated as a Strength in 33 percent of the applicable cases.
- Item 17, pertaining to the needs and services of children, parents, and foster parents, was rated as a Strength in 31 percent of the applicable cases.
- Item 18, pertaining to child and family involvement in case planning, was rated as a Strength in 33 percent of the applicable cases.
- Item 20, pertaining to caseworker visits with parents, was rated as a Strength in 23 percent of the applicable cases.
- Rhode Island did not meet the national standard for the data indicators pertaining to the absence of maltreatment recurrence, the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff, timeliness and permanency of reunification, and placement stability.

The State's low performance with regard to these CFSR outcomes and national data standards may be attributed in part to the following factors:

- There is a failure to identify all permanency options early in the case planning process and the lack of concurrent planning.
- There is inconsistent practice in engaging parents, particularly fathers, in case planning.
- Quality and quantity of caseworker visits with both children and parents is insufficient to ensure safety, permanency, and well-being of children. The lack of visits between caseworkers and children in in-home cases affected all well-being outcomes for in-home cases.
- There is a need for DCYF and the court to jointly assess and address systemic barriers that have a direct impact on ensuring safety and achieving permanency for children.

## **Key CFSR Findings Regarding Systemic Factors**

With regard to systemic factors, Rhode Island is in substantial conformity with the systemic factors of Statewide Information System; QA System; Staff and Provider Training; Agency Responsiveness to the Community; and Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. The State is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factors pertaining to Case Review System, or Service Array and Resource Development.

### **I. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES**

#### **Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect**

Safety Outcome 1 incorporates two items. One pertains to the timeliness of initiating a response to a child maltreatment report (item 1), and the other relates to the recurrence of substantiated or indicated maltreatment within a 6-month time period (item 2). Safety Outcome 1 also incorporates two national data indicators for which national standards have been established. These data indicators measure the absence of maltreatment recurrence and the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 91.3 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. It should be noted that taken individually, the two indicators used to assess this outcome were rated as a Strength in more than 90 percent of the cases. However, taken together, the percentage of cases that substantially achieved this outcome did not meet the required 95 percent.

The outcome was substantially achieved in 100 percent of applicable Bristol cases, 71 percent of applicable North Kingstown cases, and 100 percent of applicable Providence cases. In addition to the case review findings, the State did not meet the national standards for the national data indicators pertaining to absence of maltreatment recurrence or absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.

The 2010 CFSR found that the State was generally consistent in initiating a response and completing face-to-face contacts to a maltreatment report within the timeframes established by State policy and that in the majority of cases, there was an absence of maltreatment recurrence within a 6-month period.

Rhode Island also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. The primary concern identified in the 2004 review was the State was not effective in preventing maltreatment recurrence.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- Revised the safety assessment, investigative summary, and intake summary to improve the identification of safety issues and the development of a specific protective plan, and to ensure that critical safety information is shared at case transfer
- Implemented the Information and Referral (I&R) process that requires follow-up on reports on families already open to DCYF when the reports do not meet the criteria for investigation but may need additional case management. As part of the I&R process, caseworkers must contact the family to assess and discuss the concerns contained in the report.
- Developed and implemented the Family Centered Risk and Protective Capacity Assessment (FCRPCA) and a new case/service plan informed by that assessment
- Conducted a case analysis with the assistance of the National Resource Center on Child Protective Services to determine contributing factors to the State's rate of repeat maltreatment and strategies for improvement
- Created a new CPS investigation finding ("unfounded—referred for case management review") that allows investigators to determine that while no maltreatment is substantiated, the family is in need of and willing to engage with community-based services
- Trained staff on how to assess safety and risk and how to develop viable safety plans
- Participated in a Breakthrough Series on safety and risk, with a goal of enhancing and engaging natural family supports to increase family resilience
- Implemented the Family Care Community Partnerships (FCCP), designed to provide immediate access to community-based crisis stabilization and family preservation services

The State met its goals for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

### **Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate**

Performance on Safety Outcome 2 is assessed through two items. One item (item 3) assesses State efforts to prevent children's removal from their homes by providing the family with services to ensure children's safety while they remain in their homes. The other item (item 4) assesses efforts to manage safety and reduce risk of harm to children in their own homes and in their foster care placements.

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 47.7 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 59 percent of Bristol cases, 41 percent of North Kingstown cases, and 45 percent of Providence cases.

The 2010 CFSR identified the following concerns in many of the cases:

- Children remaining in their own homes continued to be at risk or were subsequently removed either because services were not provided or the services that were provided did not target the key safety concerns.

- There was a lack of initial and, particularly, ongoing safety and risk assessments.
- There were safety concerns with the children that were not addressed by the agency.

Rhode Island also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State was not consistently effective in addressing underlying and ongoing risk of harm to children, particularly in situations involving parental substance abuse, mental illness, and/or domestic violence.
- In some cases, risk of harm to children had been identified but services were not provided to either children or parents.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- Developed and implemented the FCRPCA and a new case/service plan informed by that assessment
- Worked on the development of an administrative services organization to provide a statewide comprehensive network of prevention services, which was the precursor to the FCCPs
- Worked on redesigning how the State procures and manages services for children and families with the most complex needs, which was the preliminary work toward the State's current system of care effort

The State met its goals for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

### **Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations**

Six items are incorporated in the assessment of Permanency Outcome 1, although not all of them are relevant for all of the foster care cases reviewed. The items pertain to State efforts to prevent foster care reentry (item 5), ensure placement stability for children in foster care (item 6), and establish appropriate permanency goals for children in foster care in a timely manner as well as seeking termination of parental rights (TPR) in accordance with the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) (item 7). Depending on the child's permanency goal, the remaining items focus on an assessment of State efforts to achieve permanency goals (such as reunification, guardianship, adoption, or permanent placement with relatives) in a timely manner (items 8 and 9), or to ensure that children who have a case goal of OPPLA are in stable long-term placements and are adequately prepared for eventual independent living (item 10).

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 35.0 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 20 percent of Bristol cases, 30 percent of North Kingstown cases, and 45 percent of Providence cases. In addition to case review findings, Rhode Island did not meet the national standard for the data indicators pertaining to timeliness and permanency of reunification and placement stability. However, the State did meet the national standard for the data indicators pertaining to timeliness of adoptions and permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods.

The 2010 CFSR identified the following concerns in many of the cases reviewed:

- The State was not consistently effective in preventing reentry into foster care.
- The State was not consistent with regard to ensuring placement stability for children in foster care.
- The child's permanency goal was either not appropriate or not established in a timely manner.
- The agency had not sought TPR in accordance with the requirements of ASFA.
- There was a lack of concerted effort to achieve reunification or guardianship in a timely manner.
- There were delays in achieving adoptions in a timely manner.
- The State was not consistent with regard to ensuring that children with a goal of OPPLA had a permanent placement appropriate for the child's needs and/or were receiving services to ensure a successful transition from foster care to independent living.

Rhode Island also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State was not consistent in its efforts to prevent reentry into foster care.
- Reunification occurred without adequate preparation or planning, and there was a lack of post-reunification supports/resources.
- The State was not consistent with regard to ensuring placement stability for children in foster care.
- There was a lack of sufficient placement resources and a frequent use of emergency shelters, which resulted in multiple, short-term placements for children, including very young children.
- The State was not consistent with regard to establishing appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner.
- The State did not consistently make concerted efforts to achieve children's permanency goals in a timely manner.
- In some cases, inappropriate permanency goals remained in place for an extended length of time due to reluctance by DCYF and/or the court to explore other permanency options.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- Assigned a DCYF attorney to handle only TPR appeals to decrease the length of time for appeals
- Improved the process for the timely completion of license applications to promote sufficient capacity by leasing fingerprinting equipment to expedite the background check process and by contracting home studies to reduce the completion time
- Created a database within the Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST) that allows the Placement Unit to see the foster homes with openings and the characteristics of the children that these foster homes are willing to accept in order to better match children entering foster care with an appropriate placement
- Developed and implemented policy on locating and engaging absent parents, including the use of Federal Parent Locator Services
- Trained DCYF staff and community partners on the relevance of fathers and paternal relatives on children's permanency and well-being
- Developed and implemented the FCRPCA and a new service plan informed by that assessment

- Trained staff on the new assessment and service plan process and tool, with an emphasis on engaging the family in the assessment and planning process
- Trained supervisors on the use of guardianship as a permanency option
- Established an Adoption Specialist Certification Program to increase the level of adoption expertise among clinicians in the State

The Children's Bureau has not yet made a determination regarding the achievement of the measure of this outcome for the 2004 CFSR Program Improvement Plan.

**Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children**

Permanency Outcome 2 incorporates six items that assess State performance with regard to (1) placing children in foster care near their parents and close relatives (item 11); (2) placing siblings together (item 12); (3) ensuring frequent visitation between children and their parents and siblings in foster care (item 13); (4) preserving connections of children in foster care with extended family, community, cultural heritage, religion, and schools (item 14); (5) seeking relatives as potential placement resources (item 15); and (6) promoting relationships between children and their parents while the children are in foster care (item 16).

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 52.5 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 60 percent of Bristol cases, 50 percent of North Kingstown cases, and 50 percent of Providence cases.

The 2010 CFSR found that the State was effective with regard to placing children in close proximity to their parents. Additionally, although not rated a Strength, in 16 of the 18 applicable cases reviewed, the State made concerted efforts to place siblings together or identified that placing siblings together was not in the best interests of at least one sibling. However, the 2010 CFSR also identified the following concerns in many of the cases reviewed:

- The frequency and quality of visitation between children in foster care and their fathers and siblings were insufficient to meet the needs of the children and families.
- The State was not consistent with regard to concerted efforts to preserve connections of children in foster care to extended families, school, and community.
- The State was not consistent in making concerted efforts to seek and assess relatives as placement resources.
- The State had not made concerted efforts to support the child's relationship with the mother and, particularly, the father while the child was in foster care.

Rhode Island also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State did not consistently place siblings together in foster care due to insufficient foster home capacity.

- The State was not consistently effective in promoting visitation between children in foster care with their parents, particularly with fathers, or with their siblings in foster care.
- The State did not consistently seek relatives as placement resources.
- The State was not consistent with regard to concerted efforts to preserve connections of children in foster care to extended families.
- The State was not consistent in promoting the relationship between children and their parents.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- Developed and implemented policy on locating and engaging absent parents, including the use of Federal Parent Locator Services
- Trained DCYF staff and community partners on the relevance of fathers and paternal relatives on children's permanency and well-being
- Developed and implemented the FCRPCA and a new service plan informed by that assessment
- Trained staff on the new assessment and service plan process and tool, with an emphasis on engaging the family in the assessment and planning process

The State met its goals for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

### **Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs**

Well-Being Outcome 1 incorporates four items. One item pertains to State efforts to ensure that the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents are assessed and that the necessary services are provided to meet identified needs (item 17). A second item examines State efforts to actively involve parents and children (when appropriate) in the case planning process (item 18). The two remaining items examine the frequency and quality of caseworker contacts with the children in their caseloads (item 19) and with the children's parents (item 20).

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 20.0 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 24 percent of Bristol cases, 18 percent of North Kingstown cases, and 19 percent of Providence cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 25 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 12 percent of the 25 in-home services cases.

The 2010 CFSR identified the following concerns in many of the cases reviewed:

- The State was generally effective in assessing and meeting the needs of children receiving foster care services. However, the State was not consistent in assessing and meeting the needs of children receiving in-home services, foster parents, mothers, and fathers.
- The State was not consistent in involving parents and children in the case planning process. Mothers, particularly in the in-home cases, were more likely to be involved in case planning than were children or fathers.

- The State was not consistent in ensuring that the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with children and parents was sufficient to meet the safety and well-being needs of the children and families.

Rhode Island also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State was not consistently effective in assessing needs and providing services to children; parents, particularly fathers; and foster parents.
- Parents and children were not consistently included in the case planning process.
- The frequency and quality of caseworker contacts with children and parents was not of sufficient quality or quantity to ensure the children's safety or well-being.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- Developed and implemented the FCRPCA and a new service plan informed by that assessment
- Revised the job specification of case aides to create the child support technician to allow for the assignment of a greater array of responsibilities
- Collaborated with the Family Court to reduce the amount of time caseworkers spend in court (and reduce the workload of DCYF staff and allow more time for caseworker visits with children and parents) by assigning specific court days to caseworkers and arranging the court calendar so that the proceedings requiring the least amount of time are heard first
- Piloted a program in which a social service agency was assigned to assist families involved with the Truancy Court in accessing services, thereby avoiding a referral to DCYF that would increase demands on caseworkers' time
- Revised the information packet provided to kinship providers at the time of placement to include information on supports and services available to foster families and contact information for key DCYF staff
- Initiated a pilot project in Regions 3 and 4 to provide foster parents support, training and assistance in locating appropriate services
- Incorporated training on family-centered practice into the required training for member agencies of the Rhode Island Council of Resource Providers for Children, Youth, and Family

The State met its goals for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

### **Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs**

Only one item is incorporated under Well-Being Outcome 2. It pertains to State efforts to assess and meet the educational needs of children in foster care and, when relevant, children in the in-home services cases (item 21).

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 87.0 percent of the cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was

substantially achieved in 100 percent of applicable Bristol cases, 86 percent of applicable North Kingstown cases, and 81 percent of applicable Providence cases. Additionally, the outcome was substantially achieved in 94 percent of the 36 applicable foster care cases and 72 percent of the 18 applicable in-home services cases.

The 2010 CFSR found that, generally, the educational needs of children in foster care were being appropriately and adequately assessed and addressed. However, in several of the applicable in-home services cases, educational needs were not assessed or addressed although education-related concerns were apparent and a reason for DCYF contact.

Rhode Island also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. The key concern identified in the 2004 CFSR was that the State did not consistently make concerted efforts to ensure that the educational needs of children were addressed, particularly for the in-home cases. To address the identified concern, the State developed and implemented the FCRPCA to assess educational needs and a new service plan informed by that assessment.

The State met its goals for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

### **Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs**

This outcome incorporates two items pertaining to State efforts to assess and meet the physical health (item 22) and mental health (item 23) needs of children in foster care and children in the in-home services cases, if relevant.

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was substantially achieved in 71.9 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 76 percent of Bristol cases, 69 percent of applicable North Kingstown cases, and 71 percent of Providence cases. Additionally, the outcome was substantially achieved in 82.5 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 54 percent of the 24 applicable in-home services cases.

The 2010 CFSR found that, in general, the physical and dental needs of children were appropriately assessed and adequately addressed. However, the 2010 CFSR also found that mental health needs were not adequately assessed and/or addressed for children, particularly in the in-home services cases.

Rhode Island also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State was not consistently effective in meeting children's physical and mental health needs.

- The State did not respond appropriately in some in-home services cases when presenting or underlying issues warranted a mental health assessment and/or mental health services.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- Developed and implemented a FCRPCA that included medical, mental health, and behavioral needs, and a new service plan informed by that assessment
- Developed an interface to match children in RICHIST and in the Department of Health's KidsNet system, which tracks immunizations for all children in the State
- Developed an interface for DCYF staff to view, via claims data, physical and behavioral health visits children have had
- Developed policy and procedural guidelines to ensure appropriate referrals of children to early intervention services
- Rules and regulations were established for a children's mental health emergency service system: a toll-free hotline available for families on a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week basis, with requirements that a child-family competent clinician assist the family onsite within 2 hours of receiving a call for help

The State met its goals for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

## **II. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS**

### **Statewide Information System**

Substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System is determined by whether the State is operating an information system that can provide accurate and timely information pertaining to the status, demographic characteristics, location, and case goals for the placement of every child in foster care.

Rhode Island is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. The 2010 CFSR determined that RICHIST can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for every child in foster care.

Rhode Island also was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2004 CFSR and was not required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

### **Case Review System**

Five items are included in the assessment of State performance for the systemic factor of Case Review System. The items examine development of case plans and parent involvement in that process (item 25), the consistency of 6-month case reviews (item 26) and

12-month permanency hearings (item 27), implementation of procedures to seek TPR in accordance with the timeframes established in ASFA (item 28), and notification of foster and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers about case reviews and hearings to be held regarding the children in their care and about their right to be heard in those proceedings (item 29).

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. The 2010 CFSR determined that the State provides a process for periodic review of the status of each child at least every 6 months through Administrative Review Unit reviews, and that judicial reviews also occur in some cases. However, the CFSR also identified the following concerns:

- Although the State provides a process to ensure that each child has a written case plan, the case plans are not consistently developed jointly with the child's parents.
- Permanency hearings are not consistently held in a timely manner, and hearings do not always focus on issues relevant to establishing permanency for the child.
- TPR petitions are not being filed in a timely manner. CFSR findings indicate that ASFA requirements with regard to filing for TPR were met in 43 percent of 14 applicable cases.
- Caregivers are not being consistently notified about court hearings and are not consistently given the opportunity to be heard at court hearings.

Rhode Island also was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State was not consistent in developing written case plans for all children in foster care, particularly children who entered foster care through the juvenile justice system.
- The agency was not consistent in involving parents in the case planning process.
- Periodic reviews were not conducted in a timely manner for every child in foster care, particularly children who entered foster care through the juvenile justice system.
- Permanency hearings were not held in a timely manner for all children in foster care, particularly children who entered foster care through the juvenile justice system.
- Although a process was in place to pursue TPR in accordance with the provisions of ASFA, this process was not adhered to on a consistent basis.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- Developed and implemented the FCRPCA and a new service plan informed by that assessment with staff from the Family Service Unit (FSU) and Juvenile Probation and Parole (JP&P) designing, piloting, and providing training
- Trained FSU and JP&P staff on the new assessment and service plan process and tool, with an emphasis on engaging the family in the assessment and planning process
- Issued an administrative order through the Family Court mandating that all juvenile justice cases be scheduled for permanency hearings

- Established a process for DCYF to more effectively convey critical case information to the Family Court
- Enhanced the case review process to ensure review standards are in line with the CFSR safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes

The State met its goals for this systemic factor by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

### **Quality Assurance System**

Performance with regard to the systemic factor of QA System is based on whether the State has developed standards that ensure the safety and health of children in foster care (item 30), and whether the State is operating a statewide QA system that evaluates the quality and effectiveness of services and measures program strengths and areas needing improvement (item 31).

Rhode Island is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of QA System. The 2010 CFSR determined that the State has standards and procedures in place to protect the safety and health of children. The 2010 CFSR also determined that the State has an identifiable and functioning QA system that addresses key practice areas and provides feedback on key findings.

Rhode Island was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan. The primary concern from the 2004 review was that the State had not developed an identifiable QA system. To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- Created a QA function within DCYF
- Designed a comprehensive QA system to focus on outcomes and address quality of services
- Implemented the QA system by conducting reviews, modeled after the Federal CFSR, in each Regional Office
- Developed a process for providing evaluation and QA findings to stakeholders to inform systemic change

The State met its goals for this systemic factor by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

### **Staff and Provider Training**

The systemic factor of Staff and Provider Training incorporates an assessment of the State's training provided to new caseworkers (item 32), the ongoing training provided to agency staff (item 33), and both initial and ongoing training provided to foster and adoptive parents (item 34). This systemic factor does not assess the training of service providers other than child welfare agency staff unless the service providers are private agency caseworkers, operating under a contract with the State, who have full case management responsibilities.

Rhode Island is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Staff and Provider Training. The 2010 CFSR determined the following:

- The State provides competency-based pre-service training to new caseworkers and juvenile probation officers, and these staff are required to pass a final examination at the conclusion of training.
- The State provides initial and ongoing training for foster and adoptive parents, including licensed relative caregivers.
- Ongoing training is not required for foster parents; however, it is available through various venues.
- Residential facilities are required to maintain a written training plan.

However, the 2010 CFSR also found that although ongoing training is required for staff and supported through training opportunities, these requirements are not consistently monitored.

Rhode Island was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State did not mandate initial training for juvenile probation workers, who in Rhode Island deliver services under titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act.
- The requirements for ongoing training were not consistently applied or enforced.
- Ongoing training and development opportunities were not consistently extended to supervisors.
- There was insufficient ongoing training and support for foster parents to assist them in performing their duties.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- Developed and implemented a core curriculum for JP&P staff
- Developed and implemented an in-service training program for supervisors
- Developed a statewide, in-service training program for foster and adoptive families based on a survey of the training needs of potential participants through the Adoption and Foster Care Taskforce, of which DCYF is a member

The State met its goals for this systemic factor by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

### **Service Array and Resource Development**

The assessment of the systemic factor of Service Array and Resource Development incorporates answers to three questions: Does the State have in place an array of services that meets the needs of children and families served by the child welfare agency (item 35)? Are the services accessible to families and children throughout the State (item 36)? Can services be individualized to meet the unique needs of the children and family served by the child welfare agency (item 37)?

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array and Resource Development. The 2010 CFSR determined that the State has an appropriate array of key services to meet the needs of children and families. However, the 2010 CFSR also identified the following concerns:

- Although there is a range of services in the State, there are many challenges to ensuring that families and children in all areas of the State can access the services, including limited transportation, insufficient resources in some areas of the State, and loss of eligibility of Medicaid to pay for services for parents whose children are in foster care.
- Individualization of services is not available to all children and families open to DCYF.

Rhode Island also was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- There were service gaps in key areas that affected children's safety, permanency, and well-being.
- The availability of key services varied by region, and long waiting lists for some services impeded the timely delivery of services to parents and children.
- The State did not consistently individualize services to meet the unique needs of children and families.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- Worked on the development of an administrative services organization to provide a statewide comprehensive network of prevention services, which was the precursor to the FCCP
- Worked on redesigning how it procures and manages services for children and families with the most complex needs, which was the preliminary work toward the State's current system of care effort

The State met its goals for this systemic factor by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

### **Agency Responsiveness to the Community**

Performance with regard to the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community incorporates an assessment of the State's consultation with external stakeholders in developing the CFSP and producing Annual Progress and Service Reports (APSRs) (items 38 and 39), and the extent to which the State coordinates child welfare services with services or benefits of other Federal or Federally-assisted programs serving the same population (item 40).

Rhode Island is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. The 2010 CFSR determined the following:

- The State has consulted with stakeholders regarding the goals of the CFSP and engages in ongoing consultation with key stakeholders through the Child Welfare Advisory Committee.
- The APSR is completed with input from various stakeholders who also consult on the CFSP.

- DCYF services are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or Federally-assisted programs serving the same population.

Rhode Island was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- Key stakeholders reported having little input into the development of DCYF's CFSP and APSRs.
- Although there was strong collaboration among State-level agency leadership to coordinate Federal and Federally-assisted programs, these collaborative efforts were not consistently implemented at the level of local service provision.
- There was very limited collaboration between DCYF and the Family Court.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Created a Quality Assurance Advisory Committee comprised of internal and external stakeholders to review QA results and provide policy and practice recommendations to the department
- Established a process for public input on development and implementation of the CFSP and APSR
- Established regular monthly meetings between the DCYF director and the chief judge of the Family Court; began holding regular retreats for DCYF and court staff, and improved collaboration between DCYF and the court on Court Improvement Program activities
- Established a process for DCYF to more effectively convey critical case information to the Family Court

The State met its goals for this systemic factor by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

### **Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention**

The assessment of this systemic factor focuses on the State's standards for foster homes and child care institutions (items 41 and 42), the State's compliance with Federal requirements for criminal background checks for foster and adoptive parents (item 43), the State's efforts to recruit foster and adoptive parents that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of foster children (item 44), and the State's activities with regard to using cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate permanent placements for waiting children (item 45).

Rhode Island is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. The 2010 CFSR determined the following:

- The State has comprehensive written regulations and standards for foster family homes and child care institutions in place that are consistently applied.
- DCYF conducts criminal background checks on all prospective foster and adoptive parents.
- No license is issued to any foster or pre-adoptive parent without every household member age 18 years and older submitting to the State and nationwide criminal record check.

- Licensed child care facilities must conduct department child welfare record checks and State and nationwide criminal record checks on all staff prior to employment.
- DCYF uses cross-jurisdictional resources to locate placements for waiting children.

However, the 2010 CFSR also found that although the State engages in a wide variety of recruitment activities, the diversity of foster and adoptive parent applicants does not reflect that of the foster care population.

Rhode Island was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State did not have an effective process in place to ensure the recruitment of foster and adoptive families who reflected the racial and ethnic diversity of the children in State custody.
- Although a process was in place for the use of cross-jurisdictional resources, it was not effective to facilitate permanency for children.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following core strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Improved the process for the timely completion of license applications to promote sufficient capacity by leasing fingerprinting equipment to expedite the background check process and by contracting home studies to reduce the completion time
- Provided training to supervisors and caseworkers on the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children process and on resources available to facilitate cross-jurisdictional adoptions

The State met its goals for this systemic factor by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

**Table 1. Rhode Island 2010 CFSR Ratings for Safety and Permanency Outcomes and Items**

| Outcomes and Indicators  | Outcome Ratings            |                                 |                         | Item Ratings |                  |
|--|----------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|------------------|
|  | In Substantial Conformity? | Percent Substantially Achieved* | Met National Standards? | Rating**     | Percent Strength |
| <b>Safety Outcome 1:</b> Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect          | No                         | 91.3                            | 2 No                    |              |                  |
| Item 1. Timeliness of investigations   |                            |                                 |                         | Strength     | 96               |
| Item 2. Repeat maltreatment  |                            |                                 |                         | Strength     | 94               |
| <b>Safety Outcome 2:</b> Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate | No                         | 47.7                            |                         |              |                  |
| Item 3. Services to protect children in home   |                            |                                 |                         | ANI          | 76               |
| Item 4. Risk of harm   |                            |                                 |                         | ANI          | 51               |
| <b>Permanency Outcome 1:</b> Children have permanency and stability in their living situations       | No                         | 35.0                            | 2 Yes<br>2 No           |              |                  |
| Item 5. Foster care reentry  |                            |                                 |                         | ANI          | 83               |
| Item 6. Stability of foster care placements  |                            |                                 |                         | ANI          | 80               |
| Item 7. Permanency goal for child  |                            |                                 |                         | ANI          | 45               |
| Item 8. Reunification, guardianship, and placement with relatives                                    |                            |                                 |                         | ANI          | 59               |
| Item 9. Adoption   |                            |                                 |                         | ANI          | 30               |
| Item 10. Other planned living arrangement  |                            |                                 |                         | ANI          | 33               |
| <b>Permanency Outcome 2:</b> The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved     | No                         | 52.5                            |                         |              |                  |
| Item 11. Proximity of placement  |                            |                                 |                         | Strength     | 97               |
| Item 12. Placement with siblings   |                            |                                 |                         | ANI          | 89               |
| Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care   |                            |                                 |                         | ANI          | 62               |
| Item 14. Preserving connections  |                            |                                 |                         | ANI          | 82.5             |
| Item 15. Relative placement  |                            |                                 |                         | ANI          | 52               |
| Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents  |                            |                                 |                         | ANI          | 44               |

\* 95 percent of the applicable cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome for the State to be in substantial conformity with the outcome.

\*\* Items may be rated as Strengths or as Areas Needing Improvement (ANI). For an overall rating of Strength, 90 percent of cases must be rated as a Strength.

**Table 2. Rhode Island 2010 CFSR Ratings for Child and Family Well-Being Outcomes and Items**

| Outcomes and Indicators   | Outcome Ratings            |                                | Item Ratings |                  |
|---|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|------------------|
|   | In Substantial Conformity? | Percent Substantially Achieved | Rating**     | Percent Strength |
| <b>Well-Being Outcome 1:</b> Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs          | No                         | 20.0                           |              |                  |
| Item 17. Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents   |                            |                                | ANI          | 31               |
| Item 18. Child/family involvement in case planning  |                            |                                | ANI          | 33               |
| Item 19. Caseworker visits with child   |                            |                                | ANI          | 60               |
| Item 20. Caseworker visits with parents   |                            |                                | ANI          | 23               |
| <b>Well-Being Outcome 2:</b> Children receive services to meet their educational needs                | No                         | 87.0                           |              |                  |
| Item 21. Educational needs of child   |                            |                                | ANI          | 87               |
| <b>Well-Being Outcome 3:</b> Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs | No                         | 71.9                           |              |                  |
| Item 22. Physical health of child   |                            |                                | Strength     | 90               |
| Item 23. Mental/behavioral health of child  |                            |                                | ANI          | 76               |

\* 95 percent of the applicable cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome for the State to be in substantial conformity with the outcome.

\*\* Items may be rated as Strengths or as Areas Needing Improvement (ANI). For an overall rating of Strength, 90 percent of the cases reviewed for the item (with the exception of item 21) must be rated as a Strength. Because item 21 is the only item for Well-Being Outcome 2, the requirement of a 95-percent Strength rating applies.

**Table 3. Rhode Island 2010 CFSR Ratings for Systemic Factors and Items**

| <b>Systemic Factors and Items</b>   | <b>Substantial<br/>Conformity?</b> | <b>Score*</b> | <b>Item<br/>Rating**</b> |
|---|------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Statewide Information System</b>   | Yes                                | 4             |                          |
| Item 24. The State is operating a statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or, within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care  |                                    |               | Strength                 |
| <b>Case Review System</b>   | No                                 | 2             |                          |
| Item 25. The State provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions   |                                    |               | ANI                      |
| Item 26. The State provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review   |                                    |               | Strength                 |
| Item 27. The State provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter  |                                    |               | ANI                      |
| Item 28. The State provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act  |                                    |               | ANI                      |
| Item 29. The State provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child  |                                    |               | ANI                      |
| <b>Quality Assurance System</b>   | Yes                                | 4             |                          |
| Item 30. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children  |                                    |               | Strength                 |
| Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented |                                    |               | Strength                 |
| <b>Staff and Provider Training</b>  | Yes                                | 3             |                          |
| Item 32. The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services   |                                    |               | Strength                 |
| Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP   |                                    |               | ANI                      |
| Item 34. The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children                        |                                    |               | Strength                 |

| <b>Systemic Factors and Items</b>   | <b>Substantial Conformity?</b> | <b>Score*</b> | <b>Item Rating**</b> |
|---|--------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| <b>Service Array and Resource Development</b>   | No                             | 2             |                      |
| Item 35. The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 36. The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP   |                                |               | ANI                  |
| Item 37. The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency   |                                |               | ANI                  |
| <b>Agency Responsiveness to the Community</b>   | Yes                            | 4             |                      |
| Item 38. In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with Tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP   |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, Annual Progress and Services Reports delivered pursuant to the CFSP   |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 40. The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or Federally-assisted programs serving the same population  |                                |               | Strength             |
| <b>Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention</b>   | Yes                            | 3             |                      |
| Item 41. The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards  |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 42. The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds  |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 43. The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children   |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed   |                                |               | ANI                  |
| Item 45. The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children  |                                |               | Strength             |

\* Scores range from 1 to 4. A score of 1 or 2 means that the factor is not in substantial conformity. A score of 3 or 4 means that the factor is in substantial conformity.

\*\* Items may be rated as Strengths or as Areas Needing Improvement (ANI).