

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Administration for Children and Families  
Administration on Children, Youth and Families  
Children's Bureau

**FINAL REPORT**

**RHODE ISLAND CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW**

**September 8, 2004**

## **Final Report: Rhode Island Child and Family Services Review Executive Summary**

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Rhode Island. The CFSR assesses State performance on seven child welfare outcomes pertaining to children's safety, permanency, and well being and on seven systemic factors related to the State's capacity to achieve positive outcomes for children and families. The Rhode Island CFSR was conducted the week of March 8, 2004. The period under review was from October 1, 2002 to March 8, 2004. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the State child welfare agency – the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).
- The State Data Profile, prepared by the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which provides State child welfare data for the years 1999 through 2002;
- Reviews of 49 cases at three sites in the State (North Kingstown, Pawtucket, and Providence County).
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State-level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, a Tribal representative, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, and attorneys.

The results of the Rhode Island CFSR indicate that the State is not in substantial conformity with the seven child welfare outcomes assessed through the CFSR or six of the seven systemic factors. A key issue that affected the rating of many systemic factors was the lack of sufficient attention to cases served by the child welfare agency involving children in the juvenile justice system. Although the CFSR determined that DCYF is making concerted efforts to improve this situation, stakeholders reported that many cases involving juvenile justice children still do not have case plans and are not subjected to administrative reviews and permanency hearings on an ongoing consistent basis. Another issue that affected systemic factor ratings was the lack of collaboration between the courts and the agency. Although the onsite CFSR found that DCYF is implementing practices to improve this relationship, stakeholders perceived the lack of a positive collaborative relationship as having a negative affect on the ability of the State either to achieve permanency for children in a timely manner or to ensure children's safety.

With regard to the outcomes, the areas of greatest concern pertain to Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations), and Well-Being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs).

Permanency Outcome 1 was determined to be substantially achieved in only 42.3 percent of the foster care cases reviewed during the CFSR. Key findings were that DCYF is not consistent in its efforts to (1) prevent re-entry into foster care, (2) ensure children's placement stability while in foster care, (3) establish appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner, and (4) achieve children's permanency goals in a timely manner.

Well-Being Outcome 1 was determined to be substantially achieved in only 18.4 percent of the cases reviewed. Each indicator for this outcome was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. In general, ratings for the indicators did not differ between foster care and in-home services cases. Key findings were that DCYF does not make concerted efforts to meet the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents; involve children and parents in the case planning process; or establish face-to-face contact with children and parents with sufficient frequency to ensure children's safety and well-being.

Concerns also were identified with regard to Safety Outcome 2 (Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate). Reviewers found that in several cases there was obvious risk of harm to children remaining in their own homes and yet services were not provided to either the children or the parents. Some stakeholders attributed this in part to a commonly accepted state practice of permitting parents to plead to dependency rather than to abuse or neglect. Under this plea, DCYF does not have the same authority to require parents to engage in services that would reduce the risk of further maltreatment and address underlying familial issues.

With regard to the seven systemic factors, the CFSR determined that the State was in substantial conformity with the factor of Statewide Information System. The State did not achieve substantial conformity with the systemic factors of Case Review System, Quality Assurance System, Training, Service Array, Agency Responsiveness to the Community, and Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. With regard to the Case Review System, the CFSR found that although DCYF had established policies and procedures intended to attain permanency in a timely manner, these policies and procedures were not being implemented in a consistent manner, particularly for youth who enter foster care through the juvenile justice system. The CFSR found that DCYF has only recently made concerted efforts to ensure that case plans are developed, case reviews are held, and permanency hearings are convened for these youth.

Stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSR identified the following concerns pertaining to the ability of the agency to achieve permanency for children in a timely manner: (1) some judges do not follow the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act and do not adhere to 12-month reviews on a consistent basis; (2) there is extensive variation across courtrooms with regard to the quality of the permanency hearing; and (3) recommendations made through the Administrative Review process are not taken into consideration by the courts or by the agency.

Key concerns related to other systemic factors included the following: (1) there are gaps in critical services that impact children's safety, permanency, and well-being, (2) DCYF does not mandate training for Juvenile Probation workers (who are responsible for delivering services under titles IV-B and IV-E), who consequently rarely attend training; (3) DCYF does not have a comprehensive quality assurance system; and (4) DCYF efforts to recruit/retain foster homes that reflect the ethnic diversity of the foster care population vary in intensity across the State.

The overall findings with regard to the State's performance on the 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 relative to the national standards and table 4 provides information pertaining to the State's substantial conformity with the seven systemic factors assessed through the CFSR. A summary of major findings is presented below.

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

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

Safety Outcome 1 incorporates two indicators. One pertains to the timeliness of initiating a response to a child maltreatment report (item 1), and the other relates to whether children experience a recurrence of substantiated or indicated maltreatment (item 2).

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 77.5 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.
- The State did not meet the national standard for (1) the percentage of children experiencing more than one substantiated or indicated child maltreatment report within a 6-month period, or (2) the percentage of children experiencing maltreatment by a foster care provider.

A key CFSR finding with regard to this outcome is that DCYF consistently initiates investigations of maltreatment and establishes face-to-face contact with the alleged child victim in accordance with State-established timeframes. However, with respect to repeat maltreatment, both the State Data Profile and case reviews indicate that DCYF is not consistent in preventing the recurrence of child maltreatment within a 6-month period. Maltreatment recurred within a 6-month period in 7 (58%) of the 12 cases in which there was at least 1 substantiated maltreatment report during the period under review.

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

Performance on Safety Outcome 2 is assessed through two indicators. One indicator (item 3) addresses the child welfare agency's efforts to prevent the removal of children from their homes by providing services to the families that ensure children's safety while they remain in their homes. The other indicator (item 4) pertains to the child welfare agency's effectiveness in reducing risk of harm to children.

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 65.9 percent of the applicable cases reviewed, which does not meet the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.

A key concern identified during the CFSR pertained to an insufficient assessment of underlying and ongoing risk. In addition, case reviewers identified several cases in which there was risk of harm to the children in the home but the services needed to address the risk issues were not provided to either the children or the parents.

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

There are six indicators incorporated in the assessment of Permanency Outcome 1, although not all of them are relevant for all children. The indicators pertain to the child welfare agency's effectiveness in preventing foster care re-entry (item 5), ensuring placement stability for children in foster care (item 6), and establishing appropriate permanency goals for children in foster care in a timely manner (item 7). Depending on the child's permanency goal, the remaining indicators focus on the child welfare agency's efforts to achieve permanency goals (such as reunification, guardianship, adoption, and permanent placement with relatives) in a timely manner (items 8 and 9), or whether children who have "other planned living arrangements" as a case goal are in stable placements and adequately prepared for eventual independent living (item 10).

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 42.3 percent of the 26 foster care cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.
- The State Data Profile indicates that for fiscal year (FY) 2002, the State did not meet the national standards for (1) the percentage of children who were re-entering foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode, (2) the percentage of children reunified who were reunified within 12 months of entry into foster care, or (3) the percentage of children in foster care for less than 12 months and who experienced no more than 2 placements.

The State did meet the national standard for the percentage of children adopted in FY 2002 who achieved a finalized adoption within 24 months of entry into foster care. However, CFSR case reviewers determined that in 5 of the 6 cases in which adoption was the child's permanency goal, the agency had not made concerted efforts to achieve the adoption in a timely manner.

A key CFSR finding is that all indicators for Permanency Outcome 1 were rated as Areas Needing Improvement. Case reviewers determined that DCYF was not consistent in its efforts to (1) prevent re-entry into foster care (item 5), (2) ensure children's placement stability while in foster care (item 6), (3) establish appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner (item 7), or (4) achieve children's permanency goals in a timely manner (items 8, 9, and 10).

Information from the case reviews and stakeholder interviews identified the following as potential barriers to attaining permanency and stability for children in foster care: (1) reunification without adequate planning and preparation; (2) a lack of post-reunification supports; (3) a lack of sufficient placement resources; (4) a reliance on emergency shelter care, which results in multiple, short-term placements even for young children; and (5) the maintenance of inappropriate permanency goals for long periods of time due in part to the reluctance on the part of the agency and the courts to explore the range of permanency options.

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

Permanency Outcome 2 incorporates six indicators that assess the child welfare agency's performance with regard to (1) placing children in foster care in close proximity to their parents and 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 the relationship between children and their parents while the children are in foster care (item 16).

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 57.7 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

CFSR findings indicate that DCYF makes concerted efforts to place children in close proximity to their families. However, the findings also indicate that DCYF does not make sufficient efforts to ensure that (1) there are sufficient placement resources to be able to place siblings together in foster care (2) visitation between children and their parents and siblings in foster care is of sufficient frequency, (3) children's connections to their families are preserved, (4) relatives are sought as placement resources, or (5) the parent-

child relationship is supported or enhanced. A key concern identified in the case reviews and stakeholder interviews pertains to a lack of consistent effort on the part of the agency to involve fathers in visitation.

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

Well-Being Outcome 1 incorporates four indicators. One pertains to the child welfare agency’s 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 indicator examines the child welfare agency’s efforts to actively involve parents and children (when appropriate) in the case planning process (item 18). The two remaining indicators examine the frequency and quality of caseworker’s contacts with the children in their caseloads (item 19) and with the children’s parents (item 20).

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 18.4 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

A key CFSR finding is that all indicators for Well-Being Outcome 1 were rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Case reviews found that DCYF was not consistent in its efforts to (1) assess children and families for services and provide necessary services (item 17), (2) involve parents and children in the case-planning process (item 18), and (3) establish sufficient face-to-face contact between DCYF caseworkers and the children and parents in their caseloads (items 19 and 20). Case reviews also found that DCYF is not consistent in its efforts to establish contact with fathers, assess the service needs of fathers, or engage fathers in case planning.

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

There is only one indicator for Well-Being Outcome 2. It pertains to the child welfare agency’s efforts to address and meet the educational needs of children in both foster care and in-home services cases (item 21).

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. This determination is based on the finding that the outcome was achieved in 73.3 percent of the cases reviewed, which does not meet the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

A key CFSR finding was that DCYF is not consistent in its efforts to ensure that children’s educational needs are addressed, particularly children whose families receive services while the children remain in their own homes. This outcome was substantially achieved in 88 percent of the foster care cases compared to only 55 percent of the in-home services cases.

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

This outcome incorporates two indicators that assess the child welfare agency's efforts to meet children's physical health (item 22) and mental health (item 23) needs.

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 60.4 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

The CFSR found that DCYF was not consistent in its effort to meet children's physical and mental health needs. A particular concern pertained to the mental health needs of children in the in-home services cases. In many of those cases, reviewers determined that the agency did not respond appropriately in situations in which presenting or underlying issues warranted a mental health assessment and/or mental health services.

## **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 a Statewide information system that can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for children in foster care (item 24).

Rhode Island is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. According the Statewide Assessment, Rhode Island has an operational SACWIS system called RICHIST, that has the necessary functionality to meet Federal regulations. Stakeholders commenting on RICHIST were in agreement that the system can track the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals of children in foster care, and that the system continues to track children after they have been returned home in those situations in which DCYF retains custody of the child. Most stakeholders also expressed the opinion that information in RICHIST generally is accurate, timely, and accessible, although they noted that data entry is time-consuming. However, stakeholders reported that information on juvenile justice and mental health cases tends to be less accurate than information on child welfare cases.

## **Case Review System**

Five indicators are used to assess the State's performance with regard to the systemic factor of Case Review System. The indicators examine the 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), the implementation of procedures to seek termination of parental rights (TPR) in accordance with the timeframes established in the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) (item 28), and the notification and inclusion of foster and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers in case reviews and hearings (item 29).

The State of Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. The CFSR determined that:

- Case plans are not developed jointly with the child's parent on a consistent basis.
- DCYF is not consistent with regard to conducting a case review for all children in foster care at least once every 6 months, particularly children who enter foster care through the juvenile justice system.
- Permanency hearings are not consistently conducted every 12 months for children in who enter foster care through the juvenile justice system, although the State is in the process of addressing this concern.
- Although the State has established a process for TPR in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act, this process is not implemented on a consistent basis by either DCYF or the courts.

Despite these concerns the CFSR also found that there is a process in place for foster parents, preadoptive parents, and relative caregivers to be notified of, and to have an opportunity to be heard in, hearings and reviews.

## **Quality Assurance System**

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

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Quality Assurance System. The CFSR determined that although the State has established standards for foster parents and foster care providers to protect the health and safety of children in care, the State does not have a comprehensive Quality Assurance System that measures program strengths and areas needing improvement on a Statewide basis.

## **Training**

The systemic factor of Training incorporates an assessment of the State's new caseworker training program (item 32), ongoing training for child welfare agency staff (item 33), and training for foster and adoptive parents (item 34).

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. The CFSR determined that although the State provides excellent and comprehensive training to caseworkers in the Family Services Unit, they do not mandate the same training for Juvenile Probation workers, who also are responsible for delivering services under titles IV-B and IV-E. Stakeholders noted that because this training is not mandated for Juvenile Probation workers, very few of them participate. With regard to ongoing training, stakeholders reported that although workers are required to participate in 20 hours of ongoing training annually, this requirement is not enforced and many workers do not attend because of lack of time due to their heavy workloads. Stakeholders also reported that there is no ongoing training for supervisors and expressed concern regarding the absence of an ongoing training requirement for foster and pre-adoptive parents

## **Service Array**

The assessment of the systemic factor of Service Array addresses three questions: (1) Does the State have in place an array of services to meet the needs of children and families served by the child welfare agency (item 35)? (2) Are these services accessible to families and children throughout the State (item 36)? (3) Can services be individualized to meet the unique needs of the children and families served by the child welfare agency (item 37)?

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. The CFSR determined that although the State has a wide array of services in place, there are gaps in critical service areas that impact safety, permanency and well-being of children. Critical gaps in the service array are foster homes, foster parent support services, substance abuse services for both youth and adults, and in-home/post-reunification support services. In addition, stakeholders commented that necessary services are not accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions in the State and for those communities where services are available, access may be limited by long waiting lists. Finally, the CFSR determined that although the State is capable of individualizing services to meet the unique needs of some children and families, particularly those with high-end needs, this effort is not consistent for all children and families.

## **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 (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 not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. The CFSR determined that DCYF does not make concerted efforts, particularly at the local levels, to coordinate services with other Federal or Federally funded programs, or sufficient efforts to engage some key external and internal stakeholders in developing the CFSP or in preparing the annual CFSP progress reports. The agency's level of collaboration with the Courts is of particular concern. Stakeholders comments indicate that there are long-standing tensions between the court and DCYF that both sides recognize. They also noted that although DCYF currently is implementing efforts to address this problem, full collaboration remains a challenge.

## **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.

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor pertaining to Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. The CFSR determined that efforts to ensure 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 vary in intensity across the State. They indicated that there are difficulties recruiting foster homes to meet the placement needs of children, particularly older African American males and Native American children. Furthermore, it was noted that although there is a process in place for the use of cross-jurisdictional resources for adoption, it is not an effective process for facilitating permanency for waiting children. The CFSR found that overall efforts in this area may be hindered by caseworkers' reluctance to make inter-jurisdictional placements.

Despite these concerns, the CFSR determined that Rhode Island has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards and that these standards are equally applied to relative,

non-relative, kinship care, and adoptive homes. In addition, the CFSR found that the State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements.

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

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings			Item Ratings		
	<i>In Substantial Conformity?</i>	<i>Percent Substantially Achieved*</i>	<i>Met National Standards?</i>	<i>Rating**</i>	<i>Percent Strength</i>	<i>Met National Standards</i>
Safety Outcome 1-Children are first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect	No	77.5	No			
Item 1: Timeliness of investigations				Strength	87	
Item 2: Repeat maltreatment				ANI	82	No
Safety Outcome 2 - Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate	No	65.9				
Item 3: Services to prevent removal				ANI	79	
Item 4: Risk of harm				ANI	67	
Permanency Outcome 1- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	No	42.3	Met 1, did not meet 3			
Item 5: Foster care re-entry				ANI	89	No
Item 6: Stability of foster care placements				ANI	69	No
Item 7: Permanency goal for child				ANI	73	
Item 8: Reunification, guardianship and placement with relatives				ANI	65	No
Item 9: Adoption				ANI	17	Yes
Item 10: Other planned living arrangement				ANI	33	
Permanency Outcome 2 - The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved	No	57.7				
Item 11: Proximity of placement				Strength	96	
Item 12: Placement with siblings				ANI	75	
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care				ANI	78	
Item 14: Preserving connections				ANI	77	
Item 15: Relative placement				ANI	71	
Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents				ANI	73	

\*90 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 a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement (ANI).

**Table 2: Rhode Island CFSR Ratings for Child and Family Well Being Outcomes and Items**

<b>Outcomes and Indicators</b>	<b>Outcome Ratings</b>		<b>Item Ratings</b>			
	<i>In Substantial Conformity?</i>	<i>Percent Substantially Achieved*</i>	<i>Met National Standards</i>	<i>Rating**</i>	<i>Percent Strength</i>	<i>Met National Standards</i>
Well Being Outcome 1 - Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs	No	18.4				
Item 17: Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents				ANI	31	
Item 18: Child/family involvement in case planning				ANI	39	
Item 19: Worker visits with child				ANI	61	
Item 20: Worker visits with parents				ANI	34	
Well Being Outcome 2 - Children receive services to meet their educational needs	No	73.3				
Item 21: Educational needs of child				ANI	73	
Well Being Outcome 3 - Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs	No	60.4				
Item 22: Physical health of child				ANI	77	
Item 23: Mental health of child				ANI	61	

\*90 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 a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement (ANI).

**Table 3: Rhode Island Performance on the Six Outcome Measures for which National Standards have been established**

<b>Outcome Measure</b>	<b>National Standard</b>	<b>Rhode Island Data FY 2002</b>
Of all children who were victims of a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report in the first 6 months of CY 2002, what percent were victims of another substantiated or indicated report within a 6-month period?	6.1% or less	10.2%
Of all children who were in foster care in the first 9 months of CY 2002, what percent experienced maltreatment from foster parents or facility staff members?	0.57% or less	1.1%
Of all children who entered foster care in FY 2002, what percent were re-entering care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode?	8.6% or less	19.2%
Of all children reunified from foster care in FY 2002, what percent were reunified within 12 months of entry into foster care?	76.2% or more	66.2%
Of all children who were adopted from foster care in FY 2002, what percent were adopted within 24 months of their entry into foster care?	32.0% or more	45.0%
Of all children in foster care during FY 2002 for less than 12 months, what percent experienced no more than 2 placement settings?	86.7% or more	82.3%

**Table 4: Rhode Island CFSR Ratings for the Seven Systemic Factors**

<b>Systemic Factors</b>	<b>In Substantial Conformity?*</b>	<b>Rating**</b>
<b>IV. Statewide Information System</b>	Yes (4)	
Item 24: System can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location and goals of children in foster care		Strength
<b>V. Case Review System</b>	No (2)	
Item 25: Process for developing a case plan and for joint case planning with parents		ANI
Item 26: Process for 6-month case reviews		ANI
Item 27: Process for 12-month permanency hearings		ANI
Item 28: Process for seeking TPR in accordance with ASFA		ANI
Item 29: Process for notifying caregivers of reviews and hearings and for opportunity for them to be heard		Strength
<b>VI. Quality Assurance System</b>	No (2)	
Item 30: Standards to ensure quality services and ensure children’s safety and health		Strength
Item 31: Identifiable QA system that evaluates the quality of services and improvements		ANI
<b>VII. Training</b>	No (2)	
Item 32: Provision of initial staff training		ANI
Item 33: Provision of ongoing staff training that addresses the necessary skills and knowledge.		ANI
Item 34: Provision of training for caregivers and adoptive parents that addresses the necessary skills and knowledge		ANI
<b>VIII. Service Array</b>	No (2)	
Item 35: Availability of array of critical services		ANI
Item 36: Accessibility of services across all jurisdictions		ANI
Item 37: Ability to individualize services to meet unique needs		ANI
<b>IX. Agency Responsiveness to the Community</b>	No (2)	
Item 38: Engages in ongoing consultation with critical stakeholders in developing the CFSP		ANI
Item 39: Develops annual progress reports in consultation with stakeholders		ANI
Item 40: Coordinates services with other Federal programs		ANI
<b>X. Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention</b>	No (2)	
Item 41: Standards for foster family and child care institutions		Strength
Item 42: Standards are applied equally to all foster family and child care institutions		Strength
Item 43: Conducts necessary criminal background checks		Strength
Item 44: Diligent recruitment of foster and adoptive families that reflect children’s racial and ethnic diversity		ANI
Item 45: Uses cross-jurisdictional resources to find placements		ANI

\*Systemic factors are rated on a scale from 1 to 4. A rating of 1 or 2 indicates “Not in Substantial Conformity.” A rating of 3 or 4 indicates Substantial Conformity

\*\*Items may be rated as a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement (ANI).

# **FINAL REPORT**

## **RHODE ISLAND CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Rhode Island. The CFSR assesses State performance on seven child welfare outcomes pertaining to children’s safety, permanency, and well being and on seven systemic factors related to the State’s capacity to achieve positive outcomes for children and families. The Rhode Island CFSR was conducted the week of March 8, 2004. The period under review was from October 1, 2002 to March 8, 2004. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

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- Reviews of 49 cases at three sites in the State (North Kingstown, Pawtucket, and Providence County).
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State-level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, a Tribal representative, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, and attorneys.

The key characteristics of the 49 cases reviewed are the following:

- Nineteen cases were reviewed in Providence County, 19 in Pawtucket, and 11 in North Kingstown.
- All 49 cases had been open cases at some time during the period under review.
- 26 cases were “foster care cases” (cases in which the State child welfare agency had care and placement responsibility and the child was in an out-of-home placement at some time during the period under review), and 23 were “in-home services cases” (cases in which families received services from the child welfare agency while children remained with their families and no child in the family was in out-of-home care during the period under review).
- Of the 26 foster care cases, 10 children (38%) were younger than age 10 at the start of the period under review; 4 children (15%) were at least 10 years old, but not yet 13 years old; and 12 children (46%) were 13 years of age or older at the start of the period under review.
- Of the 26 foster care cases, 16 children (62%) were male and 10 (38%) were female.
- Of the 49 cases reviewed, there were 26 cases (53%) in which all children in the family were White (non-Hispanic); 11 cases (22%) in which all children in the family were of 2 or more races/ethnicity (including one case where the child was of Native American

heritage); 7 cases (14%) in which all the children in the family were African-American (non-Hispanic); 3 cases (6%) in which all children in the family were Hispanic; 1 case (2%) in which all children in the family were Asian; and 1 case (2%) in which the racial/ethnic identity of the child was “undetermined.”

- Of the 49 cases reviewed, reviewers identified the following as the **primary** reason for the opening of a child welfare agency case:
  - Neglect (not including medical neglect) – 19 cases (39%)
  - Child’s behavior – 9 cases (18%)
  - Substance abuse by parents – 6 cases (12%)
  - Child in juvenile justice system – 5 cases (10%)
  - Sexual abuse – 3 cases (6%)
  - Physical abuse – 1 case (2%)
  - Medical neglect – 1 case (2%)
  - Abandonment – 1 case (2%)
  - Domestic violence in the home – 1 case (2%)
  - Mental/physical health of the child– 1 case (2%)
  - Other – 2 cases (4%). One case was opened because the child’s parents were deceased and the agency took custody of the child. Another case was opened because the child ran away from another State due to allegations of physical abuse by her mother and came to live with her father in Rhode Island.
- Of the 49 cases reviewed, the most frequently cited of all reasons for children coming to the attention of the child welfare agency were the following:
  - Neglect (not including medical neglect) – 28 cases (57% of all cases)
  - Substance abuse by parents – 17 cases (35% of cases)
  - Physical abuse – 15 cases (31% of cases)
  - Child’s behavior – 14 cases (29% of cases)
- In 17 (65%) of the 26 foster care cases, the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and remained in care during the entire period under review.

The first section of this report presents CFSR findings relevant to the State’s performance in achieving specific outcomes for children in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. For each outcome, there is a table presenting key findings, a discussion of the State’s status with regard to the outcome, and a presentation and discussion of each item (indicator) assessed. The second section of the report provides an assessment and discussion of the seven systemic factors relevant to the child welfare agency’s ability to achieve positive outcomes for children.

## SECTION 1: OUTCOMES

### I. SAFETY

#### Safety Outcome 1

<b>Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.</b>					
<b>Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:</b>					
	<b>North Kingstown (Kent County)</b>	<b>Pawtucket</b>	<b>Providence County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
Substantially Achieved:	7	11	13	31	77.5
Partially Achieved:	3	3	3	9	22.5
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	0	0	
Not Applicable:	1	5	3		
<b>Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:</b>					
	<b>National Standard (Percentage)</b>	<b>State's Percentage</b>	<b>Meets Standard</b>	<b>Does Not Meet Standard</b>	
Repeat maltreatment	6.1	10.2		X	
Maltreatment of children in foster care	0.57	1.1		X	

#### STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 1

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 77.5 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.
- The State did not meet the national standard for (1) the percentage of children experiencing more than one substantiated or indicated child maltreatment report within a 6-month period, and (2) the percentage of children experiencing maltreatment by a foster care provider.

Performance on this outcome did not differ substantively (i.e., by more than 20%) across the CFSR sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 81 percent of Providence County cases, 79 percent of Pawtucket cases, and 70 percent of North Kingstown cases.

A key CFSR finding with regard to this outcome is that, for the most part, DCYF initiates investigations of maltreatment and establishes face-to-face contact with the alleged child victim in accordance with State-established timeframes. However, with respect to repeat maltreatment, both the State Data Profile and case reviews indicate that DCYF is not consistent in preventing the recurrence of child maltreatment within a 6-month period. Maltreatment recurred within a 6-month period in 7 (58%) of the 12 cases in which there was at least 1 substantiated maltreatment report during the period under review.

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 1 are presented below.

### **Item 1. Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 23 of the 49 cases. Twenty-six cases were not applicable because they did not have reports of child maltreatment during the period under review. In assessing item 1, reviewers were to determine whether the response to a maltreatment report occurring during the period under review had been initiated in accordance with the State child welfare agency requirements. DCYF has established the following timeframes:

- A report classified as “emergency” requires a Child Protective Investigator (CPI) to initiate an investigation within 10 minutes of assignment and establish face-to-face contact with the child as soon as possible thereafter.
- A report classified as “immediate” requires a CPI to initiate an investigation within the 8-hour shift in which the call was received and establish face-to-face contact with the child as soon as possible thereafter.
- A report classified as “routine” requires a CPI to initiate an investigation within 24 hours of assignment and establish face-to-face contact with the child as soon as possible thereafter.

The assessment of this item resulted in the following findings:

- Item 1 was rated as a Strength in 20 (87%) of the 23 applicable cases (9 of the 20 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 1 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 3 (13%) of the 23 applicable cases (1 of the 3 cases was a foster care case).

Ratings for item 1 did not vary substantially across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of Pawtucket cases, 82 percent of Providence County cases, and 86 percent of North Kingstown cases.

Item 1 was rated as a Strength when investigations of child maltreatment were initiated and face-to-face contact with the children was established within the timeframes required by DCYF. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when face-to-face contact was not established within the required timeframe. In one case, face-to-face contact was never established. In another case, there was a 37-day delay in meeting the required timeframe. In the third case, there were two reports; there was a 2-day delay in meeting the required timeframe for one report and a 5-day delay for the other report.

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DCYF responds to maltreatment reports in a timely manner. They suggested that the timely response is due in large part to the centralized intake system that has a hotline and 24-hour coverage. Stakeholders noted that the criteria for classifying reports and response requirements are uniform across the State. Stakeholders also noted that DCYF has a strong partnership with law enforcement and local child advocacy centers, which facilitates timely and appropriate responses to maltreatment reports. Stakeholders reported that any new maltreatment reports on open cases, including disclosures of prior maltreatment, are formally reported and investigated.

***Determination and Discussion:*** Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 87 percent of the applicable cases DCYF initiated an investigation of the maltreatment report and established face-to-face contact with the child subject of that maltreatment report in accordance with the State’s required timeframes.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the centralized unit for intake and investigation receives all reports of abuse and neglect and makes an initial determination regarding whether the report meets specified criteria for investigation. Reports meeting these criteria are assigned a response time based on the perceived level of harm and risk to the child. The Statewide Assessment indicates that DCYF is effective in meeting designated response times. As reported in the Statewide Assessment, all investigations must be completed within 10 days, although in some instances an administrator may grant an extension, which is not to exceed 30 days.

## **Item 2. Repeat maltreatment**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

***Review Findings:*** The assessment of item 2 was applicable for 38 of the 49 cases. Eleven cases were not applicable because there was never a substantiated or indicated child maltreatment report on any of the children in the family. Of these 11 cases, 4 cases were opened due to the child’s behavior (mostly truancy); 3 cases involved a child in the juvenile justice system; 2 cases were opened for services, although no maltreatment reports were substantiated; 1 case was opened due to the death of the parents; and 1 case involved a child who had runaway from home in another State. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether there had ever been

a substantiated report on the family. Reviewers also were to determine if there was at least one substantiated maltreatment report during the period under review, and if so, if another substantiated or indicated report occurred within 6 months of that report. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 2 was rated as a Strength in 31 (82%) of the 38 applicable cases (19 of the 31 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 2 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 7 (18%) of the 38 applicable cases (3 of the 7 cases were foster care cases).

Item 2 was rated as a Strength under the following circumstances:

- There was a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report involving the family prior to the period under review, but no substantiated or indicated report during the period under review (19 cases).
- There was a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report involving the family during the period under review, but there was no substantiated or indicated report within 6 months of that report (12 cases). In three of these cases, there were 2 substantiated reports during the period under review but they were more than 6 months apart.

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when a substantiated maltreatment report occurring during the period under review was within 6-months of another substantiated maltreatment report involving the same perpetrator and similar circumstances. Repeat maltreatment occurred in 7 (58%) of the 12 cases in which there was at least one substantiated maltreatment report during the period under review.

Additional findings with respect to the frequency of maltreatment reports (both substantiated and unsubstantiated) on the family prior to and during the period under review for all 49 cases were the following:

- In 4 cases, there was never a maltreatment report on the family (2 of the 4 cases were foster care cases).
- In 8 cases, there was 1 maltreatment report (1 of the 8 cases were foster care cases).
- In 15 cases, there were between 2 and 5 maltreatment reports (5 of the 10 cases were foster care cases).
- In 12 cases, there were between 6 and 10 maltreatment reports (10 of the 12 cases were foster care cases).
- In 10 cases, there were more than 10 maltreatment reports. One case had 65 reports and another case had 43 reports (8 of the 10 cases were foster care cases).

In 22 (45%) of the 49 cases reviewed there were more than 6 maltreatment reports on the family during the life of the case. Eighteen (82%) of the 22 cases were foster care cases. It is not known how many of these reports were substantiated because this information was not collected.

Most stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that the incidence of maltreatment recurrence in the State is problematic. Stakeholders attributed maltreatment recurrence to a variety of factors including the following: (1) parental substance abuse and a lack of services to address it; (2) the fact that services are rarely provided to families when maltreatment reports are

“indicated” but determined to involve a low level of risk (e.g., in these situations families are referred to community-based services rather than assigned for on-going DCYF involvement); (3) delays in providing services following a substantiated report; (4) premature reunifications; (5) lack of post-reunification supports; and (6) premature case-closures. Stakeholders also expressed concern that the commonly accepted practice of allowing parents to “plead down” to dependency from an original charge of abuse and neglect may result in children continuing to be at risk of harm. When parents plead to dependency rather than abuse or neglect DCYF does not have the same level of authority to require parents to engage in services, and stakeholders suggested that parents’ refusal to engage in services may result in maltreatment recurrence.

**Determination and Discussion:** Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the following findings:

- In 18 percent of the cases, reviewers found that at least 2 substantiated maltreatment reports occurred within a 6-month period.
- The State's rate of maltreatment recurrence for 2002 (10.2%), as reported in the State Data Profile, does not meet the national standard of 6.1 percent or less.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the rate of maltreatment recurrence has declined over the last three years (from 12.4% in 2000 to 10.2% in 2002). The Statewide Assessment notes that DCYF currently is conducting an analysis to better understand this trend to be able to further reduce the incidence of maltreatment recurrence.

### Safety Outcome 2

<b>Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.</b>					
<b>Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:</b>					
	<b>North Kingstown</b>	<b>Pawtucket</b>	<b>Providence County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
Substantially Achieved:	7	13	9	29	65.9
Partially Achieved:	1	1	5	7	15.9
Not Achieved or Addressed:	3	2	3	8	18.2
Not Applicable:	0	3	2		

### STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 2

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 65.9 percent of the applicable cases reviewed, which does not meet the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.

Performance on this outcome varied substantively across CFSR sites. The outcome was rated as a Strength in 81 percent of Pawtucket cases, 64 percent of North Kingstown cases, and 53 percent of Providence County cases.

A key concern identified during the CFSR pertained to insufficient assessments of underlying and ongoing risk, particularly risk associated with parental substance abuse, mental illness, or domestic violence. Case reviewers also identified several cases in which risk of harm to the children had been identified but services were not provided to either the children or the parents.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 2 are presented and discussed below.

### **Item 3. Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal**

\_\_\_\_\_ Strength      X Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** An assessment of item 3 was applicable in 33 cases. Cases were not applicable if the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and/or there were no substantiated or indicated maltreatment reports or identified risks of harm to any children in the home during the period under review. For this item, reviewers assessed whether, in responding to a substantiated maltreatment report or risk of harm, the agency made diligent efforts to provide services to families to prevent removal of children from their homes while at the same time ensuring their safety. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 3 was rated as a Strength in 26 (79%) of the 33 applicable cases (11 of the 26 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 3 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 7 (21%) of the 33 applicable cases (3 of the 7 cases were foster care cases)

Ratings for this item did not vary substantively across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 82 percent of Pawtucket cases, 79 percent of Providence County cases, and 75 percent of North Kingstown cases.

Item 3 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- Appropriate services were provided to parents and children to prevent removal (16 cases).
- The family received appropriate post-reunification services to prevent re-entry into foster care (6 cases).
- The children were appropriately removed from the home to ensure their safety (4 cases).

Services provided to the families included, but were not limited to, individual and family counseling and therapy, developmental and behavioral assessments, psychiatric evaluations, substance abuse and mental health assessment and treatment, parent groups, domestic

violence counseling and treatment, supervised visitation, in-home parent aide services, parent advocacy and education, home-based early intervention, day care and respite care, therapeutic recreation, intensive wraparound services, transitional and post-reunification services, independent living services, employment services, financial services, housing assistance, transportation services, and visiting nurse services.

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that DCYF did not provide services to the family (4 cases), or that the services provided were insufficient to maintain the child safely in the home (3 cases). In four of the cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement, there was a subsequent maltreatment report on the family after the initial report.

Most stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that there are not enough services available in the community to ensure children's safety if they remain in their homes. Stakeholders reported that there are waiting lists for home-based services, especially for services from providers who have been found to be effective in preventing removal. Stakeholders also noted that there is a scarcity of the following services: (1) respite care for in-home cases, (2) parent aides, (3) services to address the behavioral needs of adolescents, (4) post-reunification services, and (5) Spanish-speaking service providers.

However, some stakeholders said that the recently enacted Article 23 provides DCYF with the authority to design community-based services to prevent wayward/disobedient children from entering out-of-home care. The result, according to stakeholders, is a 50 percent reduction in the number of wayward/disobedient petitions filed. Some stakeholders identified the State's Safe Streets program as an effective approach to serving youthful offenders in their homes who would otherwise be at high risk of entering (or re-entering) the State Training School or Adult Correctional Facilities.

***Determination and Discussion:*** Item 3 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 21 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DCYF had not made diligent efforts to provide the services necessary to maintain children safely in their own homes.

According to the Statewide Assessment, investigative workers use a safety assessment tool to determine whether placement is necessary. When a report is found to be indicated, the case is forwarded to Intake and a risk assessment tool is used to determine whether to open the case to DCYF. If risk warrants ongoing DCYF involvement, the case is assigned to the Family Services Unit for assessment and case planning. When the level of risk does not warrant ongoing DCYF involvement but service needs have been identified, referrals are made to community-based programs.

Despite these policies and practices, the Statewide Assessment notes that the existing level of home-based intensive services to prevent removal or to facilitate effective reunification is insufficient to meet the need. In addition, the fact that many providers have

waiting lists for services impedes the ability of DCYF to (1) access services for families in a timely manner (i.e., immediately after completion of an investigation) and (2) provide services to all members of a family simultaneously.

#### Item 4. Risk of harm to child

\_\_\_\_ Strength      \_\_X\_\_ Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** An assessment of item 4 was applicable for 42 of the 49 cases. Seven cases were not applicable because the case was not opened due to maltreatment and the child was not at risk of harm from parents or guardians. In four of these cases, the case was opened due to the child's behavior (3 of these cases involved truancy), and in three of these cases, the child was in the juvenile justice system. In assessing item 4, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to reduce the risk of harm to the children involved in each case. This assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 4 was rated as a Strength in 28 (67%) of the 42 applicable cases (19 of the 28 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 4 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 14 (33%) of the 42 applicable cases (6 of the 14 cases were foster care cases).

Ratings for this item varied substantively across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 86 percent of Pawtucket cases, compared to 64 percent of North Kingstown cases and 53 percent of Providence County cases.

Item 4 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The risk of harm to children was appropriately managed by removing the children from the home either prior to or during the period under review and providing services to the parents (12 cases).
- The risk of harm to children was appropriately managed by removing the children from the home either prior to or during the period under review and seeking termination of parental rights (TPR) (6 cases).
- The risk of harm to children was appropriately managed by providing services to families to address risk concerns while the children remained in the home (9 cases).
- The risk of harm to children was appropriately managed by having the agency take custody of the child due to the death of the parents (1 case).

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- There was insufficient assessment of risk of harm in the family and risk issues were not addressed (7 cases: 5 in-home services cases and 2 foster care cases in which children were reunified with biological parents).

- Potential risk issues for children in foster care during their visitation with parents were not adequately addressed (2 cases: 1 foster care case in which the mother had unsupervised overnight visits with the child although reviewers indicated that there was evidence of risk of harm due to mother's mental illness; 1 foster care case in which foster parents were the "supervising" party during parent-child visits and reviewers determined that the DCYF caseworker did not have sufficient contact with the foster parents or the child to ensure child's safety during visitation).
- Either no services were provided or the services provided were not adequate to reduce the risk of harm for all children in the family (5 in-home services cases).

In several cases, reviewers identified problems in the family that contributed to the risk of harm to the children but that were not addressed by DCYF. These included, but were not limited to, parental substance abuse, parental mental illness, domestic violence, and inappropriate contact between the child and the maltreatment perpetrator.

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed concern regarding the agency's ability to adequately address risk of harm to children when they remain in their own homes. Although some stakeholders reported that the agency monitors risk appropriately, several stakeholders questioned the quality of risk assessments and whether they are being conducted with sufficient frequency on an ongoing basis.

Stakeholders also noted that some children remain in their homes when risk is present and DCYF is not addressing the risk factors in an adequate manner. Some of these stakeholders suggested that this may be due in part to the practice of permitting parents to plead to dependency rather than to abuse or neglect. Parents who plead to dependency are not required to engage in services that would reduce the risk of further maltreatment and address underlying familial issues. Stakeholders also said that sometimes the court requires the agency to permit the child to have contact with a perpetrator when the agency believes that such contact is inappropriate; or sometimes the court requires the agency to reunify a child when the agency believes that the home is not safe. Stakeholders also expressed the opinion that many youth do not feel safe in their group homes because they are located in unsafe neighborhoods.

Several stakeholders expressed concern about children's safety while in DCYF custody. Stakeholders attributed the incidence of maltreatment in foster care to the following: (1) DCYF does not have a 24-hour response capacity to respond to foster parents when they are having problems with the children in their care; and (2) there sometimes is inappropriate use of restraints in residential facilities, which may be due to the lack of experience of many young staff members employed by the facilities. Stakeholders also suggested that the State's relatively high incidence of maltreatment in foster care (according to the data in the State Data Profile) may be due to the fact that in Rhode Island, licensing violations, such as use of corporeal punishment by foster parents, are formally reported to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System as child maltreatment, even when children are not harmed. In addition,

when there is a licensing violation, all of the children in the foster home are reported to NCANDS as victims, even if only one child in the home was the subject of the violation.

***Determination and Discussion:*** Item 4 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 33 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DCYF had not made diligent efforts to address the risk of harm to the children. A key concern was that DCYF was not consistent in conducting sufficient assessments or providing adequate services to address risk of harm to children remaining in their homes.

According to the Statewide Assessment, decisions to open an indicated case within DCYF or to refer a case for community services are based on a nationally-recognized, research-based, risk assessment system that was implemented by the agency in 1995. The Statewide Assessment indicates that in 2000, a State review of all case decisions made since 1997 using the risk assessment tool found “exceptional adherence to policy” and “consistent decision making” across staff on whether to open or refer a case.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that maltreatment allegations that do not meet the initial threshold criteria for investigation are classified as Early Warnings and remain on file for 2 years. Repeat Early Warnings reports may be reviewed to see if an upgrade to an investigation is warranted. The Statewide Assessment indicates that in some instances, such reports involving cases already active for services with another division in DCYF are also classified as Early Warnings and may result in action by the current worker to address or assess the information provided in the report. The State reports an increase in the number of Early Warnings over the past few years.

Information in the Statewide Assessment also notes that the State’s CFSR pilot, conducted in 2000, identified children’s safety as an area needing improvement. Although staff in the Family Services Unit have had little recent training on the assessment of safety, the Statewide Assessment reports that DCYF is making a number of efforts designed to address this issue. These efforts include the development of training for supervisors on how to assist staff with engaging clients, obtaining more information on families, and making better safety decisions.

## II. PERMANENCY

### Permanency Outcome 1

<b>Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.</b>					
<b>Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:</b>					
	<b>North Kingstown</b>	<b>Pawtucket</b>	<b>Providence County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
Substantially Achieved:	1	5	5	11	42.3
Partially Achieved:	5	5	3	13	50.0
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	1	1	2	7.7
Not Applicable:	0	0	0		
<b>Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:</b>					
	<b>National Standard (percentage)</b>	<b>State's Percentage</b>	<b>Meets Standard</b>	<b>Does Not Meet Standard</b>	
Foster care re-entries	8.6 or less	19.2		X	
Length of time to achieve reunification	76.2 or more	66.2		X	
Length of time to achieve adoption	32.0 or more	45.0	X		
Stability of foster care placements	86.7 or more	82.3		X	

### STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 1

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 42.3 percent of the 26 foster care cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.
- The State Data Profile indicates that for fiscal year (FY) 2002, the State did not meet the national standards for (1) the percentage of children who were re-entering foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode, (2) the percentage of children reunified who were reunified within 12 months of entry into foster care, or (3) the percentage of children in foster care for less than 12 months who experienced no more than 2 placements.

The State did meet the national standard for the percentage of children adopted in FY 2002 who achieved a finalized adoption within 24 months of entry into foster care. However, CFSR case reviewers determined that in 5 of the 6 cases in which adoption was the child's permanency goal, the agency had not made concerted efforts to achieve the adoption in a timely manner.

Although performance on this outcome was generally low in all CFSR sites, there was cross-site variation. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 55.5 percent of Providence County cases and 45 percent of Pawtucket cases, compared to 17 percent of North Kingstown cases.

A key CFSR finding is that all indicators for Permanency Outcome 1 were rated as Areas Needing Improvement. Case reviewers determined that DCYF was not consistent in its efforts to (1) prevent re-entry into foster care (item 5), (2) ensure children's placement stability while in foster care (item 6), (3) establish appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner (item 7), or (4) achieve children's permanency goals in a timely manner (items 8, 9, and 10).

Information from the case reviews and stakeholder interviews identifies the following as potential key barriers to attaining permanency and stability for children in foster care: (1) reunification without adequate planning and preparation; (2) a lack of post-reunification supports; (3) a lack of sufficient placement resources; (4) a reliance on emergency shelter care, which results in multiple, short-term placements even for young children; and (5) the maintenance of inappropriate permanency goals for long periods of time due in part to a reluctance on the part of the agency and the courts to explore the range of permanency options for some children.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 1 are presented below.

#### **Item 5. Foster care re-entries**

Strength                       Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** Nine of the 26 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of foster care re-entries because they involved children who entered foster care during the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the entry into foster care during the period under review occurred within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. This assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 5 was rated as a Strength in 8 (89%) of the 9 applicable cases.
- Item 5 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 1 (11%) of the 9 applicable cases.

Item 5 was rated as a Strength when a child's entry into foster care during the period under review did not take place within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode. Item 5 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in one case because the child entered foster care twice during the period under review.

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State has a high rate of foster care re-entry. Stakeholders attributed this in part to the agency and court practice of returning children home “too soon,” without adequate preparation or planning. Stakeholders suggested that this problem is particularly relevant in situations in which parents with substance abuse issues have not made the necessary changes, yet children are returned to their care. Stakeholders also expressed concern about the lack of post-reunification services to support parents or relative caregivers and suggested that these services are particularly important when child behavior was the primary reason for entry into foster care. Stakeholders noted that children and youth exiting from group homes and residential care are more likely to re-enter foster care than other children. However, stakeholders also noted that juvenile justice youth who are identified as being at risk of re-entry when they leave the Training School are connected to services to prevent re-entry.

**Determination and Discussion:** Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although case reviews found that in 89 percent of the applicable cases children did not re-enter foster care within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode, the data from the State Data Profile indicate that Rhode Island’s re-entry rate for FY 2002 (19.2%) exceeds the national standard of 8.6 percent or less. The criteria and standards for both measures must be met for the item to be rated as a Strength.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State conducted a longitudinal study of a sample of children in foster care from January, 1998 to December, 2000. The study found that approximately 25 percent of children who exit care return within 12 months, and that the cohort most likely to re-enter are youth between the ages of 11 and 15. The Statewide Assessment presents the following additional findings from this study:

- Children whose initial removal involved four or more placement settings are 1.5 times as likely to re-enter within 24 months.
- Children with at least one prior removal were slightly less likely to re-enter care.
- Neither gender nor race/ethnicity had any apparent effect on rate of re-entry.

The Statewide Assessment notes that the re-entry rate may be attributed in part to the following: (1) re-hospitalizations for youth experiencing serious mental health issues; (2) youth who are Court-ordered to residential assessment and then returned home while they await placement in a treatment facility; and (3) juvenile offenders who have been discharged but who re-offend.

#### **Item 6. Stability of foster care placement**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** All 26 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 6. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the child experienced multiple placement settings during the period under review and, if so, whether the changes in placement settings were necessary to achieve the child's permanency goal or meet the child's service needs. This assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 6 was rated as a Strength in 18 (69%) of the 26 applicable cases.
- Item 6 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 8 (31%) of the 26 applicable cases.

Ratings for this item varied across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 78 percent of Providence County cases and 73 percent of Pawtucket cases, compared to 50 percent of North Kingstown cases.

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- Children in 13 cases experienced only 1 placement during the period under review (no placement changes).
- Children in 7 cases experienced 2 placements during the period under review.
- Children in 3 cases experienced 3 placements during the period under review.
- Children in 3 cases experienced 4 or more placements during the period under review (2 children experienced 4 placements and 1 child experienced 5 placements).

Item 6 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child did not experience a placement change during the period under review (11 cases), or that the placement changes experienced were in the child's best interest (7 cases), such as moving a child from a foster home to a pre-adoptive placement or moving a child from a residential treatment facility to group care.

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The child's current placement is not stable (4 cases).
- The child experienced multiple placement changes because the agency did not appropriately match the placement to the child's needs (3 cases) (i.e., need for a more or less restrictive setting, need for supportive services, or need for mental health services).
- The child experienced multiple placements due to a lack of resources (1 case).

Five of the eight children in the cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item were adolescents during the period under review. In three of the eight cases, the children were 10 years old or younger. Two of these children, ages 3 and 6, experienced two placement changes during the period under review. In addition, three of the eight children in the cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement were in runaway status at some time during the period under review.

Most stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that many children in foster care do not experience placement stability. A key problem identified by stakeholders is the lack of appropriate placements, which often results in an over-reliance on shelter care, even for young children, and in “night-to-night” placements. With regard to the latter, stakeholders noted that although there has been a significant decline recently in the incidence of “night-to-night” placements, these placements are still occurring at times, particularly for older youth. However, several stakeholders reported that DCYF has contracted with an agency called Placement Solutions to address the night-to-night placement problem by working with individual cases to find solutions, and that, as a result of this effort, there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of night-to-night placements. Some stakeholders suggested, however, that the remaining night-to-night placements may be attributed in part to the practice of court-ordered placements of children in foster care to address truancy. For example, it was reported that as many as 20 truant children at one time have occupied beds needed by children entering foster care for reasons of abuse or neglect. In addition to the issue of lack of placements, stakeholders voiced concern that the persons responsible for ensuring appropriate placements—i.e., the Care Management Team—are not always effective in meeting this goal.

Several stakeholders suggested that in some instances, placement instability may be attributed to the difficulties foster parents encounter in attempting to manage the behavior of the children in their care. These stakeholders indicated that there is a need for increased training and support for foster parents to address this issue. Pawtucket stakeholders expressed concern about the prevalence of foster care children who are in “runaway” status and who are living with their parents or in other potentially unsafe locations. Stakeholders reported that many youth in foster care do not believe that their foster parents are committed to them and believe that foster parents often “give up” too easily on the youth in their care and ask them to leave over minor incidents.

*Determination and Discussion:* Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the following:

- In 31 percent of applicable cases, reviewers determined that DCYF had not made concerted efforts to ensure placement stability for the children in foster care.
- Data from the State Data Profile for FY 2002 indicate that the percentage of children experiencing no more than 2 placements in their first 12 months in foster care (82.3%) does not meet the national standard of 86.7 percent or more.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Rhode Island has a critical need for additional foster homes. The Statewide Assessment notes that lack of placement resources results in children being placed in less than ideal placements at time of entry, and increases the likelihood that a placement change will be necessary to provide a more appropriate match. State data show that emergency placement settings account for 29.3 percent of all substitute care placements. The State Data Profile shows that 5.1 percent of children in placement were reported as “Runaway” in FY 2002, compared to 1.7 percent nationally.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that the lack of appropriate placement resources results in some youth experiencing multiple episodes of “night-to-night” placements and/or a number of placements in shelter care before a more appropriate placement is found. However, as indicated in the Statewide Assessment, there has been a decrease in the incidence of “night-to-night” placements. Information in the Statewide Assessment attributes this decrease in part to “Article 23,” a new State policy that diverts wayward/disobedient youth into services before they enter the system.

The Statewide Assessment notes several efforts by DCYF to address stability of placement, including the development of a managed network approach for continuity within a continuum of care, utilization review of all placements, and the use of a Care Management Team and a Resource Management Team to address difficult placement needs.

### **Item 7. Permanency goal for child**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** All 26 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 7. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 7 was rated Strength in 19 (73%) of the 26 applicable cases.
- Item 7 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 7 (27%) of the 26 applicable cases.

Case reviews found that the children in the 26 foster care cases had the following primary permanency goals:

- 6 children had a goal of adoption.
- 17 children had a goal of reunification.
- 3 children had a goal of long-term foster care. (In Rhode Island, long-term foster care is termed either Independent Living or Permanent Planned Living Arrangement.)

At the time of the onsite review, 14 of the 26 children had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. The agency had filed for termination of parental rights (TPR) in 8 of these cases. In one of the 14 cases the child’s parents were deceased and TPR was not an issue. For the five cases for which TPR had not been filed but should have been considered, there was no “exception” or “reason for not filing” noted in the case file.

Ratings for this item did not vary substantively across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 83 percent of North Kingstown cases, 73 percent of Pawtucket cases, and 67 percent of Providence County cases.

Item 7 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child's permanency goal was appropriate and had been established in a timely manner. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The goal is appropriate but was not established in a timely manner (2 cases).
- The goal is not appropriate given the needs of the child and the circumstances of the case (2 cases).
- The goal of long-term foster care was established for the child without a full exploration of alternative goals (3 cases).

Many stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that, for the most part, DCYF and the courts make concerted efforts to establish appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner for most children. However, they noted that for some children, both the courts and the agency tend to maintain the goal of reunification for too long a period of time, even when the situation indicates that reunification is unlikely to be achieved. In addition, stakeholders noted that in some instances, there is a lack of collaboration between the courts and DCYF, which results in a reluctance on the part of the courts to consider agency recommendations when making decisions regarding permanency.

With regard to the appropriateness of goals, State-level stakeholders expressed concern that some children are assigned the goal of long-term foster care (or Planned Permanent Living Arrangement) at young ages and that once this goal is established, the agency does not re-examine the goal or explore more permanent options, such as adoption or guardianship. This was attributed in part to the belief of many court and agency personnel that older youth and youth with difficult behavioral or mental health issues or with special needs are not “adoptable.” Stakeholders suggested that children in the juvenile justice system are served by probation staff and these staff do not view their role as pursuing permanency. State level stakeholders also noted that IL is viewed as a permanency goal rather than a service related to achieving permanency.

Stakeholders also expressed the opinion that although there are provisions to subsidize a guardianship with relatives, the subsidy rate is less than the foster care payment rate. Consequently, this is somewhat of a disincentive to relatives who may be interested in establishing guardianship.

Stakeholders indicated that concurrent planning in Rhode Island means that a foster family is identified as a possible pre-adoptive resource at the onset of a case. They suggested that this practice has resulted in emphasizing adoption as a potential goal. However, some stakeholders expressed concern that the placement of a child with a “concurrent planning family” creates tensions between the birth family and the foster family that may impede reunification efforts. Several stakeholders also noted that concurrent planning is not being implemented throughout the State.

**Determination and Discussion:** Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 27 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DCYF had not established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner.

According to the Statewide Assessment, State policy requires that workers develop case plans with permanency goals within 30-60 days of being assigned to the case. The Statewide Assessment identified the following promising practices in the area of permanency:

- Partners in Permanency (a concurrent planning service model); and
- Project Connect (a comprehensive, wraparound support for families affected by substance abuse that seeks to reduce the length of time to reunification).

Information in the Statewide Assessment indicates that DCYF has been working to bring their juvenile justice population into compliance with ASFA and to ensure that each youth in placement has a permanency goal and a case plan to work towards that goal.

#### **Item 8. Reunification, Guardianship, or Permanent Placement With Relatives**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** Item 8 was applicable for 17 of the 26 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had achieved the goal of reunification for children in a timely manner or, if the goals had not been achieved, whether the agency had made, or was in the process of making, diligent efforts to achieve the goals. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 8 was rated as a Strength in 11 (65%) of the 17 applicable cases.
- Item 8 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 6 (35%) of the 17 applicable cases.

Ratings for this item varied across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 71 percent of Pawtucket cases, 67 percent of Providence County cases, and 50 percent of North Kingstown cases.

All 17 applicable cases involved children with a permanency goal of reunification. The goal was achieved in 8 cases; in 6 of those cases, the goal was achieved within 12 months; in one case, the goal was achieved in 16 months, and in the other case, the goal was achieved in 23 months. In 7 of the 9 cases in which the goal of reunification had not been achieved at the time of the onsite review, the child had been in foster care for more than 12 months, with a range from 13 months to 29 months.

Item 8 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined either that the agency had achieved reunification in a timely manner or had made or was making, concerted efforts to achieve reunification in a timely manner. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The goal of reunification had been achieved, but the child had been in foster care for longer than 12 months and the agency had not provided sufficient services to expedite the reunification (2 cases).
- The goal of reunification had been achieved, but the safety of the child had not been carefully considered by the agency and no post-reunification services were being offered (1 case).
- The goal of reunification had not been achieved because of lack of sufficient services to both mothers and fathers (2 cases).
- The goal of reunification had not been achieved and was not likely to be achieved due to mother's mental illness (1 case).

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed differing opinions. State-level stakeholders reported that the agency is cautious about reunification, which they believe contributes to the time it takes to achieve this goal. Many local-level stakeholders, however, expressed concern that reunification is pursued too soon and that the court will order a child to return home in situations in which parents have not followed through with services. In addition, some local-level stakeholders noted that the courts often order the agency to continue making reasonable efforts to reunify the family even when children have been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months and no progress has been made toward reunification.

Stakeholders identified the following practices and procedures as facilitating reunification in a timely manner:

- Providence County stakeholders noted that reunifications are completed in a timely manner when DCYF and service providers work together as a team and when post-reunification supports are provided to the family.
- Pawtucket stakeholders reported that reunifications are achieved in a timely manner when family meetings are held both at the onset of the case and on an ongoing basis to ensure consistent communication among all parties.
- Pawtucket stakeholders reported that the Drug Court greatly facilitates the achievement of timely reunifications. Parents receive multiple services through the Drug Court and are required to attend court every 2 weeks. This allows the Judge to have greater knowledge about parents' progress toward achieving the goal.

Stakeholders in Providence County and Pawtucket also identified the following barriers to achieving reunification in a timely manner.

- Family poverty. If a family is on public assistance and the child is removed, the family loses both the financial assistance and housing. Since housing is a requirement for reunification, and many families cannot afford housing, children are remaining in foster care for long periods of time because of family poverty.
- Lack of services. Services to promote reunification are not readily available, particularly psychological evaluations, visitation services, parent aide services, and culturally appropriate services offered by Spanish speaking providers.

**Determination and Discussion:** Item 8 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the following findings:

- Data from the State Data Profile indicate that for FY 2002, the percentage of reunifications occurring within 12 months of entry into foster care (66.2%) does not meet the national standard of 76.2 percent or more, and
- In 35 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DCYF had not made diligent efforts to attain the goal of reunification in a timely manner.

According to the Statewide Assessment, reunification is the primary goal for a child or youth in DCYF custody. Although DCYF encourages guardianship where appropriate, it is used infrequently in practice. This may be the result of the subsidy payments available for guardians being less than the foster care payment rates.

Information from the Statewide Assessment suggests that Rhode Island's reunification rate is impacted by an increase of juvenile justice and mental health cases in the foster care population. The Statewide Assessment indicates that timely reunification for these populations is usually hampered by the duration of court-ordered sentences and complex treatment needs. In addition, the lengthy waiting lists for Outreach and Tracking services (a community-based provider that promotes family preservation and school completion for youth) and the lack of in-home wraparound services may delay return home for some youth.

### **Item 9. Adoption**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** Six of the 26 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 9. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether diligent efforts had been, or were being, made to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. The results were the following:

- Item 9 was rated as a Strength in 1 (17%) of the 6 applicable cases.
- Item 9 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 5 (83%) of the 6 applicable cases.

The one case rated as a Strength for this item was in Pawtucket.

At the time of the onsite CFSR, an adoption was finalized in 1 of the 6 applicable cases and this finalization occurred within 24 months of the child's entry into foster care. Four of the five remaining children were in pre-adoptive placements at the time of the onsite CFSR.

Item 9 was rated as a Strength in 1 case when reviewers determined that the goal was achieved within 24 months of the child's entry into foster care. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- At the time of the onsite review, the child had been in foster care for 32 months and the adoption goal was in place for 20 months. There was an 8-month delay between establishing the goal and filing the TPR petition. At the time of the onsite review in March 2004, a year had passed since the petition was filed and the mother had not been served, although her whereabouts were known, and the father had not been contacted, although paternity was legally established.
- The child entered foster care in 1999 at the age of 7. Although the initial goal was adoption, TPR was not achieved until 2001, and the child was still in foster care at the time of the onsite review due to multiple placement disruptions resulting from the child's behavioral problems. However, the child was in a pre-adoptive placement at the time of the onsite review.
- At the time of the onsite review, the child had been in foster care for 29 months and although the child was in an adoptive placement with a relative at the time of the onsite review, there were extensive agency-related delays to this placement. The agency did not actively seek relatives as potential placements and when a relative came forward, it was 11 months before the agency placed the child with the relative.
- At the time of the onsite review, the child had been in foster care since June 2002. The agency had established the goal of adoption in a timely manner and filed for TPR in a timely manner, but TPR was denied due to a court determination that the agency had not made reasonable efforts to reunify and not made a sufficient case to prove abandonment by the parents.
- At the time of the onsite review, the child had been in foster care for 3.5 years and was in a pre-adoptive placement. The goal of reunification was maintained for 2.5 years to allow parents more time to make the changes necessary for reunification. However, reviewers noted that the mother made no progress during this time period and even gave birth to another child who was immediately taken into State custody. The adoption is expected to be finalized in May 2004.

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR reported that adoptions are occurring in a timely manner if an adoptive family is readily available, if the agency files for TPR in a timely manner, and if the court approves the TPR. However, stakeholders noted that post-adoption supports (in addition to adoption subsidies) are needed to prevent disruptions. Stakeholders noted that 80 percent of foster parents adopt the children in their care. This statistic is confirmed by data provided in the Statewide Assessment.

State-level stakeholders reported that Adoption Rhode Island assists in recruiting adoptive families, facilitates matching children to pre-adoptive homes, and provides post-adoption services. Stakeholders also noted that Tribal consent to TPR and adoption is granted if all parties agree that adoption is the most appropriate plan for child. Local-level stakeholders identified a number of practices that facilitated timely adoptions in their jurisdictions. North Kingstown stakeholders reported that although there are delays in the TPR process, once TPR has been granted adoptions tend to occur quickly. They also reported that the required 6-month waiting period before finalization after TPR can be waived by the court if the adopting parents are the child's foster parents.

Several stakeholders reported that adoption is expedited by the use of mediation to facilitate the TPR process and by using concurrent planning to identify a pre-adoptive resource early on in a case. Stakeholders also noted that open adoptions have resulted in a greater willingness of biological parents to accept TPR without a hearing, which further expedites the adoption process.

However, stakeholders also reported the following agency- and court-related barriers to timely adoptions:

- Delays in identifying the children who are in need of adoptive resources.
- Underutilization of Adoption Rhode Island by DCYF caseworkers.
- The perception on the part of the agency and the courts that older children are not adoptable, particularly those with behavioral and mental health issues or with special needs.
- A reluctance on the part of the court to seek TPR for children age 14 and older.
- A lack of sufficient legal consultation for the agency, which results in delays in filing the TPR petition.
- A reluctance of some judges to grant TPR if the child is not in an adoptive placement.

***Determination and Discussion:*** Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in five of the six applicable cases (83%), reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to achieve adoption in a timely manner. Although data from the State Data Profile indicate that Rhode Island's percentage of finalized adoptions in FY 2002 occurring within 24 months of entry into foster care (45%) meets the national standard of 32.0 percent or more, the criteria and standards for both measures must be met for the item to be rated as a Strength. The national standard measures the percentage of finalized adoptions in a given fiscal year that were finalized within 24 months of the child's entry into foster care. The CFSR onsite case review process includes cases in which an adoption was not yet finalized as well as cases in which the adoption was finalized during the CFSR period under review.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Rhode Island has implemented a number of measures to achieve timely adoptions. This includes the following: (1) a change in State law in 1994 that allows expedited filing of TPRs; (2) the implementation by the Family Court of a mediation process to encourage voluntary relinquishment, when appropriate; (3) implementation of family-centered practice; (4) caseworker support provided by the Adoption Promotion and Support Staff; and (5) the DCYF partnership with Adoption Rhode Island. However, the Statewide Assessment also identified the following barriers to timely adoptions: (1) lengthy extensions of the goal of reunification for the rehabilitation of families; (2) judges who require that an adoptive family be identified before TPR; and (3) the lengthy TPR appeal process through the State Supreme Court.

## Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** Three of the foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 10. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine if the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to assist children in attaining their goals related to other planned permanent living arrangements. The results were the following:

- Item 10 was rated as a Strength in 1 (33%) of the 3 applicable cases.
- Item 10 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 2 (67%) of the 3 applicable cases.

The one case rated as a Strength for this item was in Providence County. None of the cases in North Kingstown had a permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement.

Item 10 was rated as a Strength in one case when reviewers determined that the child was in a planned living arrangement that met his needs for permanency. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in two cases when reviewers determined that the child's living situation at the time of the onsite CFSR was not a permanent placement. In both cases rated Area Needing Improvement children were placed for several years in situations that were known by the agency to not be permanent placements.

Several stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that the goal of other planned living arrangement is used appropriately. Other stakeholders, however, indicated that other goals, such as adoption, have not been fully explored by the agency and the courts, particularly when the child is age 14 or older.

Stakeholders noted that most youth age 15 and older tend to have a goal of independent living (IL) without ongoing consideration of alternative goals. Stakeholders reported that an extensive life skills program is available and youth are eligible to receive IL services until age 21. Stakeholders noted that the IL program can individualize services for older youth and increase service intensity, supports, and case management oversight when the need arises. They reported that although IL transition plans are reviewed at each 6-month review, waiting lists for life skills assessments and delays in receiving the results of the assessments are impediments to the development of IL case plans.

**Determination and Discussion:** Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in two (67%) of the three applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to assist children in attaining their goals related to other planned permanent living arrangements.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Rhode Island considers “independent living” and “permanent planned living arrangement with other” as permanency goals. The Statewide Assessment notes that independent living is a realistic goal for many youth in care because DCYF serves an older population, as well as juvenile justice, wayward/disobedient, and mental health cases. DCYF provides independent living services to youth transitioning to adulthood. This includes life skills training, job training and other skill-building opportunities, and financial support for postsecondary education.

**Permanency Outcome 2**

<b>Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.</b>					
<b>Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:</b>					
	<b>North Kingstown</b>	<b>Pawtucket</b>	<b>Providence County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
Substantially Achieved:	2	7	6	15	57.7
Partially Achieved:	3	4	3	10	38.5
Not Achieved or Addressed:	1	0	0	1	3.8
Not Applicable:					

**STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2**

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 57.7 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

Performance on this outcome varied across CFSR sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 67 percent of Providence County cases and 64 percent of Pawtucket cases, compared to 33 percent of North Kingstown cases.

CFSR findings indicate that DCYF makes concerted efforts to place children in close proximity to their families. However, the findings also indicate that DCYF does not make sufficient efforts to ensure that (1) there are sufficient placement resources to be able to place siblings together in foster care (2) visitation between children and their parents and siblings in foster care is of sufficient frequency, (3) children’s connections to their families are preserved, (4) relatives are sought as placement resources, or (5) the parent-child relationship is supported or enhanced. A key concern identified in the case reviews and stakeholder interviews pertains to a lack of consistent effort on the part of the agency to involve fathers in visitation.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 2 are presented below.

### **Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement**

Strength                       Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** Twenty-four of the 26 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 11. Cases determined to be not applicable were those in which (1) TPR had been attained prior to the period under review, (2) contact with parents was not considered to be in the child's best interest, and/or (3) parents were deceased or whereabouts were unknown. In assessing item 11, reviewers were to determine whether the child's most recent foster care setting was in close proximity to the child's parents or close relatives. This assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 11 was rated as a Strength in 23 (96%) of the 24 applicable cases.
- Item 11 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 1 (4%) of the 24 applicable cases.

Item 11 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The child was placed in the same community as parents or relatives (11 cases).
- The child's out-of-county placement (10 cases) or out-of-State placement (2 cases) was necessary to meet the child's needs (12 cases).

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in one case because reviewers determined that a child's out-of-county placement in a non-relative foster home was not necessary to meet the child's service needs.

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions about the agency's effectiveness in placing children in close proximity to their home communities. Stakeholders in North Kingstown reported that the agency makes concerted efforts to place children in close proximity to their families, although they noted that some children are placed outside the community to meet their service needs. However, Pawtucket stakeholders said that there is a scarcity of placement options for children between the ages of 10 and 16, which often results in those children being placed outside of their communities of origin.

State-level stakeholders noted that a moratorium on out-of-State placements was recently established. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that this has created a context for capacity building within the State to maintain children and youth closer to home. However, other stakeholders voiced concern that the moratorium may result in increasing the incidence of "night-to-night"

placements. Providence County stakeholders suggested that the use of in-State resources may not always be in the child's best interests, as better treatment options may be available in other States.

**Determination and Discussion:** Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 96 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DCYF had made diligent efforts to ensure that children were placed in foster care placements that were in close proximity to their parents or relatives, or were necessary to meet special needs.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF reports a significant shortage of placement resources which adversely impacts the agency's ability to place a child in a setting most suited to meet that child's needs. Participants in focus groups convened as part of the State's self assessment process identified a need for targeted recruitment of foster families in particular communities in order to maintain children in their own communities. The Statewide Assessment indicates that DCYF has made strong efforts in recent years to increase the capacity of in-State, high-intensity treatment settings and therapeutic foster care in order to establish placements closer to the child's community. As a result, out-of-State placements have decreased from 196 in July 2001 to 99 in September 2003. In addition, the agency initiated a Care Management Team in March 2002 to ensure that children with more intense needs are placed in close proximity to family and in the least restrictive setting.

### **Item 12. Placement with siblings**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** Sixteen of the 26 foster care cases involved a child with siblings who were also in foster care. In assessing item 12, reviewers were to determine whether siblings were, or had been, placed together and, if not, whether the separation was necessary to meet the needs (service or safety needs) of one or more of the children. This assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 12 was rated as a Strength in 12 (75%) of the 16 applicable cases.
- Item 12 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 4 (25%) of the 16 applicable cases.

Ratings for this item varied across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of North Kingstown cases, compared to 78 percent of Pawtucket cases and 60 percent of Providence County cases.

In 7 of the 16 applicable cases, the child was in a placement with at least one other sibling, and in 4 of those cases, the child was in a placement with all siblings.

Item 12 was rated as a Strength if the child was in placement with all of his or her siblings (4 cases), or if reviewers determined that the separation of the siblings was necessary to meet at least one child's safety or treatment needs (8 cases). The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in four cases when reviewers determined that separation of siblings was not in the child's best interest and that insufficient efforts were made to ensure that siblings remained together. In two of these cases, reviewers noted that separation of siblings was due to the agency not making concerted efforts to ensure that sufficient placement resources are available to accommodate siblings.

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DCYF attempts to place siblings together, but that there are not enough foster home resources to accommodate sibling groups. Stakeholders reported that for the most part, when children are placed separately, it is to meet the child's special needs.

**Determination and Discussion:** This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 25 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DCYF had not made concerted efforts to place siblings together in foster care when appropriate.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF first attempts to place a child with his or her siblings. However, as indicated in the Statewide Assessment, a child's age, behavior, or service needs may preclude placement with his or her siblings. The Statewide Assessment notes that a shortage of foster family homes prevents DCYF from ensuring that children are placed in the most family-like and most appropriate setting for their individual needs.

### **Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care**

Strength                       Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** An assessment of item 13 was applicable for 23 of the 26 foster care cases. Three cases were not applicable for an assessment of this item because TPR had been established prior to the period under review and the parents were no longer involved in the children's lives (or parental visitation was terminated by court order), and the child had no siblings in foster care (or visitation between siblings was considered to be not in the child's best interest). In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine (1) whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to facilitate visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings in foster care and (2) whether these visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of children and families. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 13 was rated as a Strength in 18 (78%) of the 23 applicable cases.

- Item 13 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 5 (22%) of the 23 applicable cases.

Ratings for this item varied across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of Providence County cases, 80 percent of Pawtucket cases, and 40 percent of North Kingstown cases.

Typical visitation between children and their mothers for the 22 cases for which this assessment was applicable was the following:

- Weekly visits – 15 cases.
- Twice a month visits – 3 cases.
- Monthly visits – 1 case.
- Less than monthly visits – 2 cases.
- No visits – 1 case.

In three (14%) of the applicable cases, visits with mother occurred less frequently than once a month. In two of the three cases in which visits with mother occurred less frequently than once a month, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation.

Typical visitation between children and their fathers for the 13 cases for which this assessment was applicable was the following:

- Weekly visits – 3 cases.
- Twice a month visits – 1 case.
- Monthly visits – 2 cases
- Less than monthly visits – 2 cases.
- No visits – 5 cases.

In 7 (54%) of the applicable cases, visits with father occurred less frequently than once a month. In one of the seven cases in which visits with father occurred less frequently than once a month, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation.

An assessment of visitation among siblings was applicable in 12 cases. Typical visitation among siblings was the following:

- Weekly visits – 2 cases.
- Twice a month visits – 4 cases.
- Monthly visits – 4 cases.
- Less than monthly visits - 2 cases.

In one of the two cases in which visitation between siblings was less frequent than once a month, reviewers determined that the agency had made efforts to promote more frequent visitation.

Item 13 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that (1) the frequency of visitation met the needs of the child and parent, or (2) when visitation was less frequent than needed, DCYF had made diligent efforts to promote more frequent visitation. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- DCYF did not promote sufficient visitation between the child and his/her father (5 cases), including a case in which the permanency goal was reunification with the non-custodial father.
- DCYF did not promote sufficient visitation between siblings (1 case).
- DCYF did not promote sufficient visitation between the child and his/her mother (1 case).

Some Providence County stakeholders commenting on this item reported that the agency is effective in facilitating visitation, that supervised visits take place through the Families Together program, and that transportation services are provided to facilitate visitation. However, other stakeholders in this county noted that the frequency of visits is insufficient, particularly among siblings. They cited several barriers to more frequent visitation, including logistical difficulties, lack of transportation, and lack of time and resources on the part of foster parents to facilitate visits. North Kingstown stakeholders reported that DCYF ensures that siblings visit each other on a regular basis.

***Determination and Discussion:*** Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 22 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DCYF had not made concerted efforts to ensure that visitation between parents and children and between siblings was of sufficient frequency to meet the needs of the child. The key concern identified in the case reviews was the lack of sufficient effort to promote visitation between children and their fathers, even when the fathers were involved in the children's lives.

According to the Statewide Assessment, case plans include a visitation plan for children in placement. In addition, DCYF partners with the Providence Children's Museum on the Families Together Therapeutic Visitation Program, which has received national recognition for its innovation and effectiveness. The program operates in all four of the DCYF regional offices and serves approximately 70-80 families annually, although this is estimated to be only about 17 percent of the families that could benefit from the program. Program consultants work with DCYF staff to strengthen their capacity for supervising visitations, provide education on child development and behavior management and to provide constructive feedback to parents following visitations. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, the program has enhanced awareness among DCYF staff regarding the value of visitation as an integral part of permanency planning.

#### Item 14. Preserving connections

\_\_\_\_\_ Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** All 26 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 14. In assessing item 14, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to preserve the child's connections to neighborhood, community, heritage, family, faith, and friends while the child was in foster care. The assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 14 was rated as a Strength in 20 (77%) of the 26 applicable cases.
- Item 14 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 6 (23%) of the 26 applicable cases.

In 20 of the 26 cases, case reviewers determined that children's primary connections had been “significantly” preserved while they were in foster care; and in 5 of the 26 cases, reviewers determined that children’s primary connections had been “partially” preserved. In one case, the child in foster care was partially Native American and reviewers determined that DCYF had not notified the child’s Tribe in accordance with the provisions of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

Item 14 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that DCYF had made diligent efforts to achieve one or more of the following:

- Preservation of child’s primary connections with extended family members (12 cases).
- Preservation of child’s primary connections with siblings not in foster care (7 cases).
- Preservation of child’s primary connections with school, community, and friends (6 cases).
- Preservation of child’s primary connections with religion and ethnic/racial heritage (1 case).

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency had not made efforts to preserve the child’s connections to extended family (4 cases).
- The agency had not made efforts to preserve the child’s connections to siblings not in foster care (1 case).
- The agency had not made efforts to preserve the child’s connections to his/her culture (1 case).

Most stakeholders commenting on this item reported that DCYF makes concerted efforts to preserve connections. However, a few stakeholders questioned whether DCYF makes it a priority to preserve connections for sibling groups who have been separated for years or for older youth who are emancipating from foster care. Stakeholders suggested that once DCYF identifies emancipation as the goal for the child, there is a tendency to ignore issues pertaining to maintaining the child’s connection to family. Some stakeholders also reported a lack of culturally appropriate placements and supports for Native American and Spanish-speaking children and youth.

Stakeholders noted that agency workers routinely identify Native American children and that DCYF complies with ICWA requirements regarding notification to the Tribe. However, stakeholders also reported that the lack of placement resources is a barrier to meeting ICWA requirements for relative and/or Tribal preference placements.

**Determination and Discussion:** Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 23 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DCYF had not made diligent efforts to preserve children's connections. A key concern identified by case reviewers was that DCYF is not consistent in its efforts to promote or maintain children's connections with extended family members.

### Item 15. Relative placement

\_\_\_\_\_ Strength       X   Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** An assessment of item 15 was applicable for 21 of the 26 foster care cases. Cases that were not applicable include juvenile justice cases for which the placement was court-ordered (3 cases) or cases in which a child had treatment needs that precluded relative placement (2 cases). In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives (both maternal and paternal relatives) as potential placement resources for children in foster care. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 15 was rated as a Strength in 15 (71%) of the 21 applicable cases.
- Item 15 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 6 (29%) of the 21 applicable cases.

Ratings for this item did not vary considerably across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 78 percent of Pawtucket cases and 67 percent of Providence County and North Kingstown cases.

Item 15 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that children were placed with relatives (8 cases) or that DCYF had made diligent efforts to search for both maternal and paternal relatives (7 cases). The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when the child was not placed with a relative and reviewers determined that DCYF had not made diligent efforts to search for either paternal or maternal relatives (4 case), had searched for maternal but not paternal relatives (1 case), or had searched for paternal but not maternal relatives (1 case).

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DCYF makes concerted efforts to seek relatives as placement resources. They noted that relatives are sought in a number of situations, including emergency removals, short-term placement, Tribal placements, and adoptions. However, some stakeholders indicated that the agency does not seek paternal relatives if the father is not involved with the family, and does not routinely inquire about fictive kin who may serve as placement resources for the child.

**Determination and Discussion:** Item 15 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 29 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DCYF had not made diligent efforts to locate and assess all relatives as potential placement resources.

According to the Statewide Assessment, State law requires DCYF to first explore suitable relative placements before seeking alternatives. The Statewide Assessment notes that DCYF makes concerted efforts to place a child with relatives, and failing that, with fictive kin or another child-specific placement in order to preserve the child's existing support system. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, DCYF has initiated a process of holding a Family Team Meeting (FTM) to bring together family, extended family, and other community and professional supports to make case decisions in partnership with DCYF. One of the goals of the FTM is to identify and provide input on available kinship supports and other potential placements. However, very few (24) FTMs had been held at the time the Statewide Assessment was prepared. The Statewide Assessment also indicates that although the State Data Profile shows that 21.9 percent of the foster care population is placed with relatives, that statistic increases to 52.6 percent when fictive kin and child-specific placements (such as a teacher or family friend that is recruited as a foster parent for a particular child) are added.

#### **Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** An assessment of item 16 was applicable for 22 of the 26 foster care cases. A case was considered not applicable if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved with the child, or if a relationship with the parents was considered to be not in the child's best interests. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to support or maintain the bond between children in foster care and their mothers and/or fathers. This assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 16 was rated as a Strength in 16 (73%) of the 22 applicable cases.
- Item 16 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 6 (27%) of the 22 applicable cases.

Ratings for this item varied across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 86 percent of Providence County cases and 80 percent of Pawtucket cases, compared to 40 percent of North Kingstown cases.

Item 16 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that DCYF had made concerted efforts to promote the parent-child bond of children in foster care. The primary effort identified pertained to promoting frequent visitation between children and parents. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the agency did not promote parental involvement with the child or attempt to strengthen the parent-child relationship through visitation or participation in other activities. Reviewers determined that the agency had not made sufficient efforts to promote the child’s relationship with the father (3 cases), with both parents (2 cases), or with the mother (1 case).

**Determination and Discussion:** Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 27 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DCYF had not made diligent efforts to support the parent-child relationships of children in foster care.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the Children’s Museum’s Families Together Therapeutic Visitation Program supports healthy interaction between parents and children. Families Together program staff provide training and consultation to DCYF staff on how to use visitation to support the relationship between the parent(s) and children. However, as noted in the Statewide Assessment, this program serves a limited number of families.

### III. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

#### Well-Being Outcome 1

<b>Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.</b>					
<b>Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:</b>					
	<b>North Kingstown</b>	<b>Pawtucket</b>	<b>Providence County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
Substantially Achieved:	1	3	5	9	18.4
Partially Achieved:	6	14	8	28	57.1
Not Achieved or Addressed:	4	2	6	12	24.5
Not Applicable:	0	0	0	0	

## STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 18.4 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

Although performance on this outcome was low in all CFSR sites, there was some variation across sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 26 percent of Providence County cases, 16 percent of Pawtucket cases, and 9 percent of North Kingstown cases.

A key CFSR finding is that all indicators for Well-Being Outcome 1 were rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Case reviews found that DCYF was not consistent in its efforts to (1) assess children and families for services and provide necessary services (item 17), (2) involve parents and children in the case-planning process (item 18), and (3) establish sufficient face-to-face contact between DCYF caseworkers and the children and parents in their caseloads (items 19 and 20). One concern identified by the case review process was that DCYF is not consistent in its efforts to assess the services needs of fathers, establish contact with fathers, or engage fathers in case planning.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Well-Being Outcome 1 are presented and discussed below.

### Item 17. Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** An assessment of item 17 was applicable for all 49 cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had (1) adequately assessed the needs of children, parents, and foster parents; and (2) provided the services necessary to meet those needs. The results were the following:

- Item 17 was rated as a Strength in 15 (31%) of the 49 applicable cases (9 of the 15 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 17 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 34 (69%) of the 49 applicable cases (17 of the 34 cases were foster care cases).

Ratings for item 17 did not differ substantively by type of case (i.e., foster care or in-home services case). The item was rated as a Strength in 35 percent of foster care cases and 26 percent of in-home services cases. Item ratings also did not vary considerably across

CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 36 percent of North Kingstown cases, 32 percent of Pawtucket cases, and 26 percent of Providence County cases.

Item 17 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that DCYF had made diligent efforts to (1) assess the needs of children, parents, and foster parents, and (2) provide appropriate services to meet identified needs.

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Children's needs were not assessed (10 [20%] of 49 applicable cases, 5 of which were foster care cases).
- Mother's needs were not assessed (17 [38%] of 45 applicable cases, 6 of which were foster care cases).
- Father's needs were not assessed (19 [63%] of 30 applicable cases, 7 of which were foster care cases).
- Foster parents' needs were not assessed (5 [29%] of 17 applicable cases)
- Needed services were not provided to children (13 [27%] of 49 applicable cases, 5 of which were foster care cases).
- Needed services were not provided to mothers (16 [37%] of 43 applicable cases, 7 of which were foster care cases).
- Needed services were not provided to fathers (17 [61%] of 28 applicable cases, 8 of which were foster care cases).
- Needed services were not provided to foster parents (6 [35%] of 17 applicable cases).

In addition, of the 49 cases reviewed for this item, 14 were cases involving children in need of services or juvenile justice cases. For these cases, the results, which are presented below, were similar to those for other cases.

- Item 17 was rated as a Strength in 5 (36%) of the 14 applicable cases (4 of the 5 cases were foster care cases).
  - Item 17 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 9 (58%) of the 12 applicable cases (3 of the 9 cases were foster care cases).
- Specific findings regarding the 9 juvenile justice and child behavior cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement were the following:
- Insufficient assessment and/or services to all family members (5 cases).
  - Insufficient assessment of foster parent's needs (2 cases).
  - Insufficient assessment of father's service needs (1 case).
  - Assessment and services provided to child but not to parents (1 case).

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions regarding DCYF's efforts to assess needs and provide appropriate services. Some stakeholders indicated that parents' needs and children's needs (including children in juvenile justice cases) are assessed and that DCYF provides adequate services to address these needs. However, other stakeholders expressed concern about the inconsistent quality of needs assessments and the difficulty that some caseworkers, particularly inexperienced caseworkers, have in linking families to appropriate services after needs have been identified. Some stakeholders noted that service providers often do not receive sufficient referral information from DCYF and have difficulty reaching the DCYF caseworker to communicate this concern or to discuss other issues pertaining to service delivery.

***Determination and Discussion:*** Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 69 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DCYF had not adequately assessed and/or addressed the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents. A key concern pertained to the lack of assessment and service provision to fathers. The father's needs were not assessed in 63 percent of the applicable cases and services were not provided to address identified needs in 61 percent of applicable cases. However, more than one-third of mothers and more than one-fifth of the children also were not assessed for service needs and did not receive services. In addition, more than one-third of the foster parents were noted to have not received services to meet identified needs.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF's approach to assessment and the provision of services varies depending on the type of case. In child welfare cases, families and children are assessed for safety, risk, and service needs. Use of the Family Centered Practice initiative has emphasized comprehensive assessments focused on safety and family strengths. For wayward/disobedient cases and cases involving mental health issues, the assessment process and service provision are focused on the needs of the primary child, rather than on the family as a whole. In contrast, youth in the juvenile justice system have traditionally not received comprehensive assessments or case plans. Youth are assessed for risk of recidivism and service needs, with the focus on meeting the conditions of probation/sentencing. The Statewide Assessment notes that DCYF is working to develop more comprehensive assessments and case plans to address identified needs of this population.

#### **Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

***Review Findings:*** An assessment of item 18 was applicable for all 49 cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether parents (including pre-adoptive parents or permanent caregivers) and children (if age-appropriate) had been involved in the case planning, and if not, whether their involvement was contrary to the child's best interest. A determination of involvement in case planning required that a parent or child had actively participated in identifying the services and goals included in the case plan. This assessment produced the following findings:

- Item 18 was rated as a Strength in 19 (39%) of the 49 applicable cases (12 of the 19 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 18 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 30 (61%) of the 49 applicable cases (14 of the 30 cases were foster care cases).

Ratings for this item varied somewhat by type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 46 percent of foster care cases compared to 30 percent of in-home services cases. Ratings did not differ substantively across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 42 percent of Pawtucket cases, 37 percent of Providence County cases, and 36 percent of North Kingstown cases.

Item 18 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that all appropriate parties had actively participated in the case planning process. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Fathers who should have been involved in case planning were not involved (21 [62%] of 34 applicable cases).
- Mothers who should have been involved in case planning were not involved (15 [33%] of 46 applicable cases).
- Children who were old enough to have been involved in case planning were not involved (14 [42%] of 33 applicable cases).

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that there is little parental input in the development of case plans. They noted that case plans tend to be developed by the caseworker and presented to the family, with a modicum of discussion at the time of the initial assessment. Although a Family Team Meeting approach to case planning has been implemented by the agency to facilitate parental involvement, stakeholders expressed the opinion that caseworkers have “not fully embraced” this practice. Stakeholders identified the following barriers to conducting family team meetings: (1) the large caseloads carried by caseworkers that make it difficult for them to find time to arrange and convene meetings; (2) the negative attitudes of some caseworkers toward the practice of developing case plans in conjunction with parents; and (3) the difficulties inherent in scheduling meetings to accommodate the schedules of working parents. Stakeholders noted, however, that when family team meetings are held, parents and youth are engaged in case planning. Stakeholders also noted that case management teams are an effective approach to engaging parents in the case-planning process, although they reported that case management teams tend to be convened only for “the most difficult cases.”

Several stakeholders expressed the opinion that the agency is not consistent in its efforts to engage non-custodial parents, incarcerated parents, or youth in case planning. Stakeholders also identified a number of barriers to engaging parents and children in case planning. These included: (1) a lack of flexibility with regard to scheduling case-planning sessions at times that are convenient for parents, children, and youth; (2) the adversarial relationships between caseworkers and parents; (3) difficulty locating parents; and (4) parents failing to attend scheduled sessions.

***Determination and Discussion:*** Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 61 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DCYF had not made diligent efforts to involve parents and/or children in the case planning process. A key concern pertained to the lack of involvement of fathers in case planning, although more than one-third of the mothers and eligible children also were not involved in the case planning process.

According to the Statewide Assessment, family involvement in case planning was identified in the 2000 CFSR pilot as an area needing improvement and remains a concern for the agency. The Statewide Assessment notes, for example, that during a youth focus group convened in August 2003, less than one-third of the 36 participating youth reported that they had contributed to the development of their case plan. The Statewide Assessment reports that to address this concern, DCYF is implementing Family-Centered Practice (FCP) throughout the State. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, a core tenet of family-centered practice is that case plans are family-driven, strength-based, and highly individualized. Although the Statewide Assessment notes that this approach is intended to result in greater engagement of families and youth in case planning, it was acknowledged that workload demands are a considerable impediment to implementing the FCP approach.

### Item 19. Caseworker visits with child

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** All 49 cases were applicable for an assessment of item 19. In conducting this assessment, reviewers were to determine whether the frequency of visits between the children's service workers and children was sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child's safety and well-being and whether visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 19 was rated as a Strength in 30 (61%) of the 49 applicable cases (16 of the 30 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 19 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 19 (39%) of the 49 applicable cases (10 of the 19 cases were foster care cases).

Ratings for this item did not differ by type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 61.5 percent of the foster care cases and 61 percent of the in-home services cases. However, item ratings differed considerably across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 84 percent of Pawtucket cases, compared to 47 percent of Providence County cases and 45 percent of North Kingstown cases.

Reviewers noted the following with respect to the frequency of caseworkers' face-to-face visits with children in the 26 foster care cases:

- In 4 cases, visits typically occurred once a week.
- In 4 cases, visits typically occurred twice a month.
- In 10 cases, visits typically occurred once a month.
- In 8 cases, visits typically occurred less frequently than once a month.

Reviewers noted the following with respect to frequency of caseworkers' face-to-face visits with children in the 23 in-home services cases:

- In 1 case, visits typically occurred once a week
- In 6 cases, visits typically occurred twice a month.
- In 8 cases, visits typically occurred once a month.
- In 8 cases, visits typically occurred less frequently than once a month.

Item 19 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and children were sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child's safety and well-being and promote attainment of case goals.

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The frequency of caseworker visits was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, but when visits did occur, they focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (9 cases).
- The frequency of caseworker visits was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child and when visits did occur, they did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (6 cases).
- The frequency of caseworker visits was sufficient to meet the needs of the child, but the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (4 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that the frequency and quality of face-to-face contact between agency workers and the children in their caseloads tend to be case specific and worker specific. Stakeholders noted that some workers are more likely than others to ensure that children are visited on a consistent basis, and that some workers tend to maintain frequent contact with some children in their caseloads but not with others, depending on the worker's perception of the stability and safety of the child. Stakeholders noted, however, that in general, children are not being visited by their workers with sufficient frequency. Some stakeholders indicated that juvenile probation staff members are more diligent than caseworkers in maintaining frequent visitation with children in their caseloads.

Stakeholders identified the following barriers to more frequent visitation: (1) caseworkers are expected to spend large amounts of time in court; (2) caseworker hours are not flexible enough to allow them to meet with children in the evening and they must request overtime pay in order to make monthly contacts; (3) the large caseloads carried by caseworkers make frequent and regular contact difficult; and (4) the high frequency of caseworker turnover results in gaps in visitation when cases are being reassigned to new caseworkers.

**Determination and Discussion:** Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 39 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children were not of sufficient frequency and/or quality to ensure children’s safety and/or promote attainment of case goals.

According to the Statewide Assessment, although agency policy requires that a DCYF caseworker must visit a child and family at least once each month, DCYF purchases almost all direct services for children and families and requires that staff of contracted vendors must have more frequent contact with children and families. The Statewide Assessment notes that barriers to more frequent contact between DCYF workers and children are : (1) large caseloads; (2) transportation duties; and (3) Federal-, State-, and court-imposed requirements that necessitate workers spending more time in the office working on documentation than in the field visiting children.

### **Item 20. Caseworker visits with parents**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** An assessment of item 20 was applicable for 47 cases. Cases were not applicable if parents were no longer involved in the lives of their children despite agency efforts to involve them. Reviewers were to assess whether the worker’s face-to-face contact with the children’s mothers and fathers (including pre-adoptive mothers and fathers) was of sufficient frequency and quality to promote attainment of case goals and/or ensure the children's safety and well being. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 20 was rated as a Strength in 16 (34%) of the 47 cases (9 of the 16 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 20 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 31 (66%) of the 47 cases (15 of the 31 cases were foster care cases).

Ratings for this item did not differ substantively by type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 37.5 percent of foster care cases, compared to 30 percent of in-home services cases. However, ratings for the item did vary across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 42 percent of Pawtucket cases and 41 percent of Providence County cases, compared to 9 percent of North Kingstown cases. All five cases involving children in the juvenile justice system and seven of the nine cases involving children in need of services were rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item.

Typical caseworker visits with mothers (including pre-adoptive mothers) were the following (45 applicable cases):

- Weekly visits – 4 cases (3 of which were foster care cases).
- Twice a month visits - 7 cases (3 of which were foster care cases).

- Monthly visits – 15 cases (6 of which were foster care cases).
- Less than monthly visits – 19 cases (11 of which were foster care cases).

Typical caseworker visits with fathers (including pre-adoptive fathers) were the following (32 applicable cases):

- Weekly visits – 1 case (which was a foster care case).
- Twice a month visits - 3 cases (1 of which was a foster care case).
- Monthly visits - 3 cases (1 of which was a foster care case).
- Less than monthly visits – 14 cases (7 of which were foster care cases).
- No visits – 11 cases (4 of which were foster care cases).

Item 20 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of parents and children and that visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- Caseworker visits with one or both parents were not occurring with sufficient frequency, but when they did occur they focused on substantive issues pertaining to the case (20 cases).
- Caseworker visits with parents were not occurring with sufficient frequency, and even when they did occur, they did not focus on substantive issues pertaining to the case (10 cases).
- Caseworker visits with parents occurred with sufficient frequency, but did not focus on substantive issues pertaining to the case (1 case).

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with parents varies across caseworkers. Stakeholders identified the following barriers to more frequent visitation: (1) workers spend an inordinate amount of time in Court; and (2) worker hours are not flexible enough to conduct visits in the evening without requesting overtime from supervisors.

***Determination and Discussion:*** Item 20 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 66 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and/or quality of caseworker visits with mothers and fathers were not sufficient to monitor the safety and well-being of the child or promote attainment of case goals.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the same DCYF policy requiring that workers visit with children once a month also applies to visits with parents, and the same barriers inhibit more frequent contact (i.e., large caseloads, transportation duties, and Federal-, State-, and court-imposed requirements that necessitate workers spending inordinate time in the office working on documentation).

**Well-Being Outcome 2**

<b>Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.</b>					
<b>Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:</b>					
	<b>North Kingstown</b>	<b>Pawtucket</b>	<b>Providence County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
Substantially Achieved:	7	16	10	33	73.3
Partially Achieved:	0	1	2	3	6.7
Not Achieved or Addressed:	2	1	6	9	20.0
Not Applicable:	2	1	1	4	

**STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 2**

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. This determination is based on the finding that the outcome was achieved in 73.3 percent of the cases reviewed, which does not meet the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

Performance on this outcome varied across CFSR sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 89 percent of Pawtucket cases and 78 percent of North Kingstown case, compared to 56 percent of Providence County cases.

A key CFSR finding was that DCYF is not consistent in its efforts to ensure that children’s educational needs are addressed, particularly children whose families receive services while the children remain in their own homes. This outcome was substantially achieved in 88 percent of the foster care cases compared to only 55 percent of the in-home services cases.

The findings for the item assessed for Well Being Outcome 2 are presented below.

**Item 21. Educational needs of the child**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** An assessment of item 21 was applicable for 45 of the 49 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable for assessment were those in which the children were not of school age, or the children were in their own homes and did not have needs

pertaining to education-related issues. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether children's educational needs were appropriately assessed and whether services were provided to meet those needs. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 21 was rated as a Strength in 33 (73%) of the 45 applicable cases (22 of the 33 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 21 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 12 (27%) of the 45 applicable cases (3 of the 12 cases were foster care cases).

Performance on this item varied as a function of the type of case (i.e., foster care or in-home services). The item was rated as a Strength in 88 percent of foster care cases compared to 55 percent of in-home services cases.

Item 21 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that all potential educational needs were assessed and addressed as appropriate. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the child had education-related service needs that were not being addressed by the agency. Reasons for this rating were:

- Lack of service provision for children with clearly-identified needs (i.e., mental retardation, ADHD, speech-delayed, behind two grades, truancy) (5 cases, one of which was a foster care case).
- Lack of monitoring or follow-up for educational services received (2 cases).
- Needs of all children in the family not addressed (2 cases).
- Child not enrolled in school (2 cases, one of which was a foster care case opened for truancy).
- Lack of attention to educational issues in case planning (1 foster care case).

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DCYF makes concerted efforts to meet children's educational needs. They noted that although placement changes often result in children having to change schools, the agency has established supports to meet identified needs. Stakeholders reported that educational advocacy is effective in this regard, and expressed praise for the efforts of foster parents, appointed educational advocates, the courts, and parent support organizations.

However, stakeholders expressed concern with enrolling children in school. They cited multiple barriers to timely enrollment including: (1) delays in the timely transfer of documents from other schools; (2) schools that refuse to accept youth who are on probation; (3) schools that are overcrowded and lack sufficient space for children; (4) language barriers for immigrant populations; and (5) children of immigrants being placed on waiting lists while parental residency issues are resolved. Stakeholders noted that DCYF advocates on behalf of children in the juvenile justice system who are denied enrollment in school.

While recognizing that truancy is a statewide issue, State-level stakeholders expressed concern with the court practice of placing children in foster care as a way to reduce truancy. Among their concerns was whether this reflects good case practice, and the

reduction caused by this practice in the number of available placements for maltreated children. Stakeholders in North Kingstown expressed concern with the lack of legal representation for children and parents in truancy court.

**Determination and Discussion:** Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 27 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DCYF had not made concerted efforts to meet children’s education-related needs. A key concern pertained to addressing educational needs in the in-home services cases.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF ensures school enrollment and attendance for both in-home and placement cases. Although formal educational assessments are not conducted, school records are requested at case opening and reviewed to determine current educational level and needs. The Statewide Assessment also notes that case plans are to include information on school placement, grade level, and special education eligibility and that specific tasks may be assigned in the case plan depending on the needs of the child (e.g., parent may be required to ensure that a truant child attends school). School progress is monitored on an ongoing basis through consultation with parents, school personnel, and attendance at school or Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings as necessary. Progress also is reviewed as part of the Administrative Review Unit meetings. The Statewide Assessment notes that DCYF provides college preparatory activities and assistance with postsecondary education expenses.

**Well-Being Outcome 3**

<b>Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.</b>					
<b>Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:</b>					
	<b>North Kingstown</b>	<b>Pawtucket</b>	<b>Providence County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
Substantially Achieved:	6	14	9	29	60.4
Partially Achieved:	0	2	7	9	18.8
Not Achieved or Addressed:	4	3	3	10	20.8
Not Applicable:	1	0	0	1	

**STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 3**

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 60.4 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

Performance on this outcome varied across CFSR sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 74 percent of Pawtucket cases, 60 percent of North Kingstown cases, and 47 percent of Providence County cases.

The CFSR found that DCYF was not consistently effective in meeting children’s physical and mental health needs. A particular concern pertained to the mental health needs of children in the in-home services cases. In many of those cases, reviewers determined that the agency did not respond appropriately in situations in which presenting or underlying issues warranted a mental health assessment and/or mental health services.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Well-Being Outcome 3 are presented and discussed below.

### **Item 22. Physical health of the child**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** An assessment of item 22 was applicable for 43 of the 49 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable for this assessment were in-home services cases in which physical health concerns were not an issue. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether (1) children's physical health needs had been appropriately assessed; and (2) the services designed to meet those needs had been, or were being, provided. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 22 was rated as a Strength in 33 (77%) of the 43 applicable cases (21 of the 33 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 22 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 10 (23%) of the 43 applicable cases (5 of the 10 cases were foster care cases).

Ratings for this item did not vary substantively by type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 81 percent of foster care cases and 71 percent of applicable in-home services cases. Item ratings varied somewhat across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 86 percent of North Kingstown case and 82 percent of Pawtucket Cases, compared to 68 percent of Providence County cases.

Item 22 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that children's health needs were routinely assessed and services were provided as needed. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that physical health needs had not been assessed and/or there was clear evidence of health-related needs that were not being addressed by the agency. Examples included a lack of provision of health care for children with identified medical concerns and a lack of provision of dental services.

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DCYF is generally effective in meeting the physical health needs of children. Stakeholders cited the Neighborhood Health Plan and Rite Care as valuable resources in the health care delivery system. However, some stakeholders reported that dental care is not consistently available throughout the State and that foster parents do not always receive necessary medical records when children are placed.

**Determination and Discussion:** Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 23 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DCYF had not made concerted efforts to address children’s health needs.

According to the Statewide Assessment, nearly all children in foster care have their health and behavioral health services covered by the Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island (NHPRI) and Beacon Behavioral Healthcare Strategies. This coverage ensures they children have a medical home and that treatment needs are assessed and provided for when they enter foster care. A new screening tool, developed jointly with NHPRI/Beacon, assists caseworkers in assessing the physical and mental health needs of children upon their initial entry into foster care, and facilitates the coordination and delivery of services and treatment in a timely manner. The Statewide Assessment notes that NHPRI is working with DCYF to develop mechanisms for linking children to necessary appointments for assessment and to ensure that follow-up treatment and care are provided. Many of the families involved with DCYF have their health coverage through Rite Care, which provides access to a variety of services, including mental health and substance abuse treatment, and transportation to appointments.

### **Item 23. Mental health of the child**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** An assessment of item 23 was applicable for 36 of the 49 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable were those in which the child was too young for an assessment of mental health needs or in-home services cases in which mental health needs were not an issue. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether (1) mental health needs had been appropriately assessed, and (2) appropriate services to address those needs had been offered or provided. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 23 was rated as a Strength in 22 (61%) of the 36 applicable cases (16 of the 22 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 23 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 14 (39%) of the 36 applicable cases (3 of the 14 cases were foster care cases).

Item ratings differed as a function of case type. The item was rated as a Strength in 84 percent of foster care cases compared to 35 percent of in-home services cases. Ratings also varied across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 75 percent of Pawtucket cases, compared to 56 percent of North Kingstown cases and 53 percent of Providence County cases.

Reviewers determined that children's mental health needs were "significantly" assessed in 25 cases, "partially" assessed in 4 cases, and "not at all" assessed in 7 cases. Reviewers determined that identified mental health service needs were "significantly met" in 20 cases, "partially met" in 8 cases, and "not at all met" in 4 cases.

Item 23 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that children's mental health needs were "significantly" or "partially" assessed, and mental health needs were significantly addressed when necessary. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Mental health needs were not fully assessed, although a mental health assessment was warranted due to sexual abuse, depression, rejection and victimization, ADHD, and family dysfunction (7 cases, one of which was a foster care case).
- Mental health needs were assessed but the agency did not ensure that needed services were provided (5 cases).
- Mental health needs of all children in the family were not assessed or addressed (2 cases).

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that there are insufficient mental health services in many areas of the State. Stakeholders in Pawtucket and Providence County identified the following concerns: (1) long waiting lists for mental health services; (2) a lack of bilingual (particularly Spanish-speaking) professionals and service providers; and (3) a lack of child psychiatrists to conduct needed evaluations and provide therapy. Stakeholders in Pawtucket also expressed difficulty accessing psychologists and reported that there are extensive delays in obtaining psychological evaluations on children.

***Determination and Discussion:*** Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 39 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DCYF had not made concerted efforts to address the mental health needs of children.

According to the Statewide Assessment, mental and behavioral health needs are assessed when children enter DCYF care or custody, and a new assessment is generally conducted any time a child begins services with a new therapist or program. Children presented before the Family Court on a wayward/disobedient petition are assessed through a central screening program, which may include a more intensive 10-day residential assessment. The Statewide Assessment notes that for in-home services cases, DCYF pays for all necessary treatment if a family lacks insurance coverage.

However, as indicated in the Statewide Assessment, there are challenges in the State to providing mental health services. The Statewide Assessment notes that there is a lack of treatment options for children throughout the continuum of care, and particularly for children who are transitioning to a less intensive level of treatment. In addition, changes in placement often require a change in clinician, thereby disrupting the therapeutic relationship previously begun. The Statewide Assessment notes that to address these concerns, DCYF is actively working to increase behavioral health capacity across the continuum of care.

**SECTION 2: SYSTEMIC FACTORS**

**IV. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM**

<b>Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity</b>			
	<b>Not in Substantial Conformity</b>		<b>Substantial Conformity</b>
Rating	1	2	3 <b>4 X</b>

Rhode Island is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. Information pertaining to the item addressed for this factor is provided below.

**Item 24. 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 months, has been) in foster care.**

  X   Strength           Area Needing Improvement

Item 24 is rated as a Strength because DCYF’s information system has the capacity to identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of children in foster care.

According the Statewide Assessment, Rhode Island has an operational SACWIS system with functionality that conforms to Federal regulations. The Rhode Island Children’s Information System (RICHIST) establishes an electronic case record and allows line staff to easily access information including: child and family demographics; child welfare status; case plan goals; placement information; and legal, medical and educational information. The Statewide Assessment reports that RICHIST generates over 24 reports with useful information for management and supervisors regarding child demographics, living arrangements, a listing of children in care for 15 of the last 22 months, daily census for the Rhode Island Training School, caseload statistics for the Family Service Unit (FSU), and Child Protective Services reports detailed by worker regarding the status of assigned investigations. However, data reports for management purposes regarding case specific information are not available at the line level for supervisors and workers.

In addition, the Statewide Assessment notes that the Data Analytic Center, in partnership with Yale University, has enhanced DCYF’s ability to produce and analyze longitudinal data and capture performance measures for all contracted programs.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, feedback from caseworkers and supervisors in the FSU is that they believe the system is working very well. The Statewide Assessment notes, however, that compliance in using RICHIST varies throughout DCYF. It was noted in the Statewide Assessment that the system was designed to be more responsive to the needs of the FSU and that other divisions have found the system less suited to their needs. Information in the Statewide Assessment indicates that although DCYF is beginning to work with the Training School and Probation to make the system more usable for them, limited funds are available to assist with these efforts.

Stakeholders commenting on RICHIST were in agreement that the system can track the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals of children in foster care, and that the system continues to track children after they have been returned home when DCYF retains custody. Most stakeholders also expressed the opinion that information in RICHIST generally is accurate, timely, and accessible, although they noted that data entry is time-consuming. However, stakeholders reported that information on juvenile justice and mental health cases tends to be less accurate than information on child welfare cases. Key concerns regarding information for the juvenile justice and mental health populations pertained to reason for agency involvement, placement changes, and need for a 6-month review.

Several stakeholders noted that some reports generated by the system provide a wealth of information by region, unit, or caseworker. However, other stakeholders observed that many of the reports that can be generated by the system are difficult to access and print, making them less useful for local-level staff.

**V. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM**

<b>Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity</b>				
	<b>Not in Substantial Conformity</b>		<b>Substantial Conformity</b>	
Rating	1	<b>2 X</b>	3	4

The State of Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. Information on the items assessed for this systemic factor is presented below.

**Item 25. 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.**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

Item 25 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because during the onsite CFSR, it was determined that (1) written case plans are not being developed for all children in foster care, particularly children who enter foster care as juvenile justice cases, and (2) parents and children are not consistently involved in the case planning process.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF policy mandates completion of a written initial case plan for each child and each case opened for service, regardless of the reason, within 30 working days of the case being assigned to a Family Services worker (or 60 days for cases involving Family Centered Practice). DCYF policy also requires that the case plan be updated every 6 months thereafter. The case plan is expected to be developed with the family and child, if age appropriate. The Statewide Assessment notes that the case plan is time-limited and goal-oriented, and identifies the proposed services for the parent(s) and child(ren). It delineates the mutual responsibilities and expectations of the parent(s), the child(ren), and the Department towards reaching the identified permanency goal. The development of the case plan is linked to the family assessment that addresses the strengths and issues of the family and the individual child's needs. The child's case plan contains the following elements: case plan goal; objectives and tasks; projected date of goal achievement; preventative services; educational and medical information regarding the child; and the visitation plan, if the child is in placement. Additionally, for all youth over the age of 16, the case plan must include a transitional living plan and independent living skills assessment.

It is noted in the Statewide Assessment that DCYF is moving towards Family-Centered Practice to effect greater family participation in case planning, although this model is not yet fully implemented. The Statewide Assessment also notes that DCYF has initiated the process of Family Team Meetings to enhance family involvement in case planning, and has been effective in doing so. (At the time the Statewide Assessment was written, only a few Family Team Meetings had actually taken place.) The Statewide Assessment also states that less than one-third of the 36 youth participating in a focus group convened as part of the State's self-assessment process reported that they had participated in the development of their case plan.

Information in the Statewide Assessment acknowledges that DCYF is not in compliance with its policy requiring that youth who are active in Probation and placed in DCYF care must have a written case plan within 30 working days of entering placement. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, DCYF is concerned with bringing these cases into compliance.

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR were in general agreement that children in foster care have case plans, although they noted that it is only recently that DCYF has made concerted efforts to ensure that case plans are developed for youth who enter foster care through the juvenile justice system. Stakeholders also noted that case plans developed for children in the juvenile justice system tend to be focused on children’s behavioral issues rather than on family issues. In addition, North Kingstown stakeholders suggested that greater coordination of efforts is needed between DCYF and the juvenile facility in preparing case plans because often there are separate treatment plans developed by each of these agencies.

Stakeholders also expressed the opinion that case plans are not consistently individualized for children and family and usually contain a list of objectives and tasks taken from the programmed list available in RICHIST. Stakeholders reported that the agency had concerns about the “cookie cutter” quality of case plans, and in response has redesigned the case plan to promote more tailored objectives, tasks, and services. Stakeholders noted that life-skill assessments and transitional living plans required for youth over the age of 16 are not always completed in a timely manner.

Several stakeholders reported that although DCYF has developed Family-Centered Practice to ensure greater involvement of parents and youth in the case planning process, this practice is not used consistently throughout the agency. They noted that a key barrier to fully implementing family-centered practice is the difficulty workers experience in arranging family team meetings. Stakeholders indicated that family team meetings often are not held because agency staff do not have the time to schedule them, facilitate them, or participate in them. In one site, stakeholders reported that there is only one person responsible for facilitating family team meetings for the entire department. Stakeholders also indicated that another barrier to convening family team meetings was the general conflictual or adversarial relationship between many workers and parents.

**Item 26. 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       Area Needing Improvement

Item 26 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. The CFSR found that although a process is in place for holding periodic reviews on a timely basis, these reviews are not conducted for every child, particularly if the child entered foster care as a juvenile justice case. In addition, some stakeholders questioned the effectiveness of reviews in moving children toward permanency in a timely manner.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the DCYF Administrative Review Unit (ARU) completes periodic reviews for children in foster care every 6 months. Review officers are assigned to each of the four regional offices where case plan reviews take place. The

ARU uses a review form that addresses safety, child and family well-being, visitation, child's needs and services, involvement of family members in case planning, and permanency issues based on ASFA-related language. Case workers receive an automated email message reminding them to schedule a review approximately 6 weeks prior to the due date.

Many stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the 6-month administrative reviews are taking place in a timely manner, although several stakeholders questioned the effectiveness of these reviews with regard to promoting timely achievement of permanency. In addition, stakeholders voiced concern that, although there have been many efforts to apply similar timeframes for permanency and other hearings for both child welfare and juvenile justice populations, children and youth in the juvenile justice population do not consistently have hearings and reviews in a timely manner. Stakeholders noted that the State began holding administrative reviews for the juvenile justice population in December 2003, and therefore some children in that population have not yet had a review. Pawtucket stakeholders reported that in addition to ARU reviews, the courts in that location conduct reviews every 3 to 6 months. However, they expressed concern that the frequency of court reviews reflected an attempt on the part of the court to "micromanage" child welfare cases.

Several stakeholders reported that although the ARU reviews focus on achieving permanency for children and youth, the recommendation of the ARU are not always shared with attorneys and the courts and often, when they are shared, are not taken into consideration by the courts. In addition, a few stakeholders questioned the effectiveness of ARU reviews, noting that although the recommendations of the ARU are shared with caseworkers there is no requirement for caseworkers to follow-up on these recommendations, thereby limiting the impact the ARU review has on case practice. As a result, the reviews often are perfunctory and take place to fulfill the Federal requirement rather than to impact the attainment of permanency in a timely manner.

**Item 27. 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.**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

Item 27 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although there is a process in place for holding permanency hearings as required, the onsite CFSR found that these hearings are not held for all children in foster care, particularly children who enter foster care as juvenile justice cases.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Rhode Island Family Court judges use special forms for permanency hearings designed to increase the effectiveness of the hearings by ensuring that appropriate questions are being asked and answered. DCYF social work and legal staff, CASA staff, public/private defenders, providers, and parent(s) attend the permanency hearings. DCYF staff provide transportation for families where necessary and appropriate.

The Statewide Assessment reports that DCYF is in the process of implementing a program to track Permanency Planning Hearings (PPH) for children in substitute care through a new module in RICHIST. Reports are generated to identify children who need to have a PPH scheduled. A legal technician reviews the reports and researches the cases to determine if a PPH occurred and responds by updating the current information. If a PPH did not take place, a request to schedule a PPH is sent to the Legal Office, which leads to a motion to the Family Court and the scheduling of a PPH.

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that, for the most part, 12-month permanency hearings are held in a timely manner. However, they noted that there are judges that do not follow the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act and do not adhere to 12-month reviews on a consistent basis. In addition, stakeholders reported that DCYF began conducting permanency hearings for children in foster care involved with juvenile justice in December 2003, and that some of these children have not yet had permanency hearings.

Stakeholders comments also indicate that there is extensive variation across courtrooms with regard to the quality of the permanency hearing. Several stakeholders questioned whether the hearings are effective in promoting the timely achievement of permanency for children in care. While many stakeholders, particularly stakeholders in North Kingston, indicated that permanency hearings involve indepth discussions of how a case is going, several stakeholders, particularly Pawtucket stakeholders, voiced concern that in some courtrooms, there is little difference between the permanency hearing and the administrative review. In these courtrooms, permanency hearings may be pro forma, lasting only about 5 minutes and not being useful in promoting permanency. Some stakeholders also noted that in some courtrooms, a full permanency hearing is not held unless parents contest a decision or other parties object to a decision. Stakeholders indicated that in response to these concerns, DCYF developed a form for judges to use to ensure that they are addressing all of the issues of concern.

**Item 28. Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.**

\_\_\_\_\_ Strength                       Area Needing Improvement

Item 28 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although Rhode Island has a process in place for terminating parental rights in accordance with the provisions of ASFA, information from the case reviews, Statewide Assessment, and stakeholder interviews suggest that the agency and the courts do not adhere to this process on a consistent basis.

According to the Statewide Assessment, administrators receive monthly reports listing all children in foster care for 15 of the last 22 months. Each case is reviewed with the appropriate supervisor to determine whether any compelling reason not to file for TPR pertains. If a compelling reason is identified, it must be approved by an administrator. Information in the Statewide Assessment indicates that, with few exceptions, Family Court judges move forward on a TPR petition even if the child is not already placed in a pre-adoptive home. However, TPRs often are delayed by the lengthy appeals process.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that State point-in-time data show that of the 2,699 children who were in foster care for 15 of the past 22 months or for 12 consecutive months: 22 percent had a TPR granted; 33 percent had the case closed, and just under 3 percent had a TPR filed. The Statewide Assessment reports, however, that the remaining 42 percent of these children had not had a TPR petition filed because they are either active with another goal in place (i.e., placement with relative), under review, and/or TPR is being actively considered.

The onsite case review process found that a TPR petition had not been filed in 5 (38%) of the 13 cases reviewed in which the child was in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, and that there were no compelling reasons noted in the case file for not pursuing TPR. In addition, the case review found that five of the six cases reviewed in which the child's permanency goal was adoption were rated as an Area Needing Improvement, and in three of these cases, the rating was due in part to the failure of the agency to seek TPR in a timely manner.

Several stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR were in general agreement that the State has established procedures for filing for TPR in accordance with ASFA timeframes. Other stakeholders, however, noted that despite these procedures, there is inconsistency among judges regarding their willingness to TPR. They reported that some judges will not terminate parental rights unless the child already has an identified adoptive family and some judges do not believe in TPR and will dismiss petitions even when parents do not appear in court. Stakeholders also noted that both the agency and the courts perceive some children (e.g., older youth, children with special needs) as "unadoptable" and will not seek TPR for these children. Finally, some stakeholders in Providence and Pawtucket expressed concern that in their view the Court may sometimes arbitrarily dismiss TPR petitions that threaten to exceed the 180 day timeframe the Court has set for disposition of a TPR petition, which necessitates the filing of a new petition and delays permanency. Pawtucket stakeholders also said that the process of achieving timely permanency for children was undermined by conflicting philosophies between DCYF and the courts on parental rights. Stakeholders expressed

concern over what they see as a reluctance on the part of the Court to terminate parental rights and the frequent court practice of maintaining reunification as the permanency goal despite the parents' lack of progress on the service plan.

Despite these views, there were stakeholders who expressed the opinion that TPR petitions are filed in a timely manner and compelling reasons not to file TPR are used appropriately. However, several stakeholders commented that there is a backlog of TPR cases due to full Court dockets. Most stakeholders also reported that TPRs are almost automatically appealed by parents and that appeals may take 1 to 2 years to resolve. However, stakeholders also noted that the State's implementation of mediation prior to the TPR hearing and the State's approval of open adoptions has greatly decreased the number of appeals and altered the adversarial nature of the process.

**Item 29. Provides a process for foster parents, preadoptive 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.**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

Item 29 is rated as a Strength because the CFSR determined that there is a process in place for foster parents, preadoptive parents and relative caregivers to be notified of and have an opportunity to be heard in hearings and reviews.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF policy requires that caseworkers notify foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caretakers of any court proceedings regarding children in their care. Rhode Island statute gives foster parents, relative caretakers and pre-adoptive parents the right to file a written or verbal report with the Court to convey information relevant to the child in their care. However, they are not considered a party to the proceedings in Family Court and generally, caregivers do not regularly attend court hearings. The Statewide Assessment notes that foster parents have requested training from DCYF on the legal process and their right to be heard by judges and others in the judicial system, and this training is being developed.

The Statewide Assessment notes that foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers also are given the opportunity to participate in the administrative review process. Since May 2003, the ARU has been responsible for sending out notices 4 weeks prior to each review to parents, foster parents, and youth older than 16. Prior to this date, notification was the responsibility of the caseworker. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, anecdotal information from the ARU suggests that the attendance of foster and biological parents at the reviews has increased since the change in notification responsibility was implemented.

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers are notified of administrative reviews. Stakeholders noted that since ARU began providing notice of reviews, the attendance by parents and others has improved. However, stakeholders reported that caseworkers are responsible for notifying foster and adoptive parents regarding court hearings and their performance in meeting this responsibility is inconsistent.

Most stakeholders also reported that foster parents have the opportunity to be heard in administrative reviews. However, although some stakeholders also said that foster parents have the opportunity to be heard in court hearings, other stakeholders indicated that foster parents cannot speak directly at court hearings, although they may provide a letter or provide information verbally to the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). Several stakeholders expressed concern that even when foster parents are notified about the hearings or reviews, their participation is impeded by the scheduling of these events during regular business hours and many foster parents are employed. Some stakeholders also reported that foster parents do not want to attend hearings or reviews because they want to maintain a distance from birth parents.

## VI. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
Rating	1	2 X	3	4

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Quality Assurance System. Information pertaining to the items assessed for this factor is provided below.

**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.**

  X   Strength          Area Needing Improvement

Item 30 is rated as a Strength because the CFSR found that the State has established standards for foster parents and foster care providers to protect the health and safety of children in care and monitors adherence to those standards on a consistent basis.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF regulations govern foster care, day care, child placing agencies, and child care agencies. Quality assurance for foster and adoptive homes primarily relies on worker feedback and reviews by licensing staff. The Statewide Assessment notes that contracted placements through the Division of Children’s Behavioral Health are monitored by program monitors. However, stakeholders participating in a focus group convened as part of the State’s self-assessment process reported that there is no feedback loop regarding contract issues; if staff have an issue with a provider there is no formal way to have input into the process other than to share it with the program monitor.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR indicated that the State’s standards and practices are effective in ensuring that children in foster care are provided with quality services to protect their health and safety. Stakeholders reported that Rhode Island statute places restrictions on the use of restraints, seclusion, and other discipline methods by residential facilities. They also noted that the administration of medication to children and youth by facility staff is also strictly governed. Stakeholders indicated that there are performance measures in place for contracted facilities and standards for the biennial re-licensure of foster homes. However, some stakeholders noted that license renewal visits are “alarmingly brief,” lasting about 10 minutes.

**Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the 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       Area Needing Improvement

Item 31 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the CFSR determined that the State has not developed an identifiable quality assurance system to evaluate and inform policies and practice.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF does not have an identifiable Quality Assurance (QA) function that meets the requirements of the CFSR. However, the Statewide Assessment notes that an Integrated Planning and Evaluation Team (comprised of representatives from each of the divisions of DCYF) has been established to develop a plan for continuous quality improvement throughout DCYF. According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF managers are supportive of the need for such a function.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that DCYF has been building its capacity for data analysis to support future QA efforts. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, although the Data Analytic Center, in partnership with Yale University, has enhanced DCYF’s ability to produce and analyze longitudinal data, a more refined analysis system is necessary to permit using available data to inform policy and practice.

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the agency does not have a Statewide QA system, but has established a planning group for QA development. They also noted that the Data Analytic Center assists DCYF in creating a number of reports using data from RICHIST. Stakeholders reported that DCYF meets monthly with the Data Analytic Center, the QA planning group, and others to prioritize data analysis needs.

**VII. TRAINING**

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
		1	2 <b>X</b>	3

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. Information pertaining to the items assessed for this factor is provided below.

**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       Area Needing Improvement

Item 32 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. The CFSR determined that although the State provides excellent and comprehensive training to caseworkers in the Family Services Unit, they do not mandate the same training for Juvenile Probation workers, who also are responsible for delivering services under titles IV-B and IV-E. Stakeholders noted that because this training is not mandated for Juvenile Probation workers, very few of them participate.

According to the Statewide Assessment, training for DCYF staff is provided by the Child Welfare Training Institute (CWTI), a collaboration between DCYF and the Rhode Island College of Social Work. It provides 6 months of pre-service training for new case workers, which consists of 224 hours of in-class training and 354 hours of field work. Classroom training covers a range of topics, including more than 60 hours on child abuse and neglect issues and nearly 30 hours of computer training. The first 6 weeks are spent in the classroom. Afterwards, new workers are assigned to a Family Service Unit (FSU) and begin spending one day a week in the field. The experiential learning process gradually increases, and by the sixth month workers are spending just 1 day a week in the classroom and the remainder of their time working with a caseload of 10-12 families. The 6-month probation period for new workers runs concurrently with the pre-service training activity. The Training Coordinator provides regular progress reports to the FSU supervisor at 2-, 4-, and 6-month intervals. These reports are used to develop probationary reports, which are then used by supervisors to guide recommendations for a new employee to pass probation.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, a 1-month pre-service training also is provided for child protective services (CPS) investigators. Training encompasses risk and safety assessment, forensics, medical information, investigatory practices, law enforcement roles in investigations, and how to record case information in RICHIST. The Statewide Assessment notes that most new investigators are experienced DCYF staff who are changing divisions, and who therefore already possess much of the knowledge, skills, and abilities relevant to CPS investigations.

The Statewide Assessment notes that there is currently no training curriculum for newly promoted supervisors. The Statewide Assessment does not address the initial training provided to Juvenile Probation staff.

Some stakeholders commenting on the area of training during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the new training offered by the CWTI is of good quality. However, many stakeholders expressed concern that the end of the training period coincides with the end of the probationary period for caseworkers, and that it is difficult to evaluate new staff while they are still in training. However, they noted that this concurrent period was negotiated by the union.

Several stakeholders expressed concern that although the initial training provided to FSU caseworkers is available to Juvenile Probation Officers, it is not a mandatory requirement and they rarely attend.

**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.**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

Item 33 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because although on-going training is required of staff and supported through training opportunities in collaboration with the Child Welfare Training Institute (CWTI), these requirements are not consistently applied or enforced. The CFSR found that these requirements are routinely disregarded due to heavy workload demands. In addition, the same opportunities for on-going training and development are not extended to supervisors.

According to the Statewide Assessment, workers must attend a minimum of 20 hours of in-service training per year, and the CWTI provides a full curriculum to meet this requirement. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, classes may be held during non-traditional hours, as needed, to accommodate staff schedules. However, the Statewide Assessment reports that increased caseload demands have resulted in decreased participation in training and many last-minute cancellations and that many courses fill up quickly which prevents some workers from receiving needed training. The Statewide Assessment also reports that supervisors do not have the authority to require a worker to participate in a particular training. In addition, as indicated in the Statewide Assessment, DCYF does not have an employee evaluation process in place to assess worker performance after the initial 6-month probationary/pre-service training period.

Information in the Statewide Assessment also indicates that DCYF staff can pursue continuing education credits through the School of Social Work at Rhode Island College. In addition, the CWTI recently began to offer certificate programs for DCYF staff in specialized skills. A continuing education program is available for qualified employees to pursue a Master's Degree in social work or other related fields. Educational leave opportunities are granted (there are four part-time slots and one full-time slot available).

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR reported that although 20 hours of ongoing training is required annually, this requirement is not enforced and in actuality, there is little time for workers to attend training due to heavy workloads. Also, there is no ongoing training for supervisors. Stakeholders also noted that there is a good selection of training topics, but that more training needs to be made available regarding legal issues, family assessment, interviewing skills, and sexual abuse.

Some stakeholders reported that CWTI meets with supervisors on a monthly basis to assess training needs, and supervisors can track caseworkers' participation in training. While there is no in-service training requirement for supervisors, all pre-service training offered to new staff is open to supervisors. In addition, CWTI provided training for supervisors regarding family centered practice within the past year.

**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      \_\_\_X\_\_\_ Area Needing Improvement

Item 34 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although DCYF requires and supports pre-service training for foster and adoptive parents, the onsite CFSR found that there is insufficient on-going training and support for foster parents to assist them in carrying out their duties.

According to the Statewide Assessment, foster and adoptive parents are required to complete pre-service training provided by the Adoption and Foster Care Preparation and Support Unit. This unit consists of five clinical training specialists and one supervisor, and is responsible for training, assessing, and approving foster and adoptive parents. The Unit conducts dual pre-service training of foster and adoptive parents, emphasizing a concurrent model of foster care. The core curriculum focuses on information sharing and skill building and is designed to prepare families for parenting a child with special needs. Applicants must successfully complete the 27 hours of training in order to be approved and/or licensed.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that DCYF has begun to offer separate kinship classes for relatives unable to attend the full 10-week pre-service training sessions. This is a 6-hour course that covers all of the core issues and is offered either as one Saturday session or two evening sessions. The Statewide Assessment reports that this course is offered at least bi-monthly, but concerns have been raised that relative/kinship providers do not complete the training before a child is placed with them.

Information in the Statewide Assessment indicates that ongoing training currently is not required for foster parents although DCYF is developing an in-service training model. DCYF is working with the Rhode Island Foster Parents Association (RIFPA) to create a process to evaluate the effectiveness of pre-service training and to identify the ongoing training needs of foster and adoptive families. At a meeting in May 2003, foster parents expressed the need for stronger support and in-service training to prevent placement disruptions. The Statewide Assessment notes that RIFPA offers a mentor program to support foster parents.

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR were in general agreement that DCYF provides pre-service training to foster parents, adoptive parents, kinship caregivers, and residential care staff but that there is no ongoing training requirement. Stakeholders also expressed concern about the quality of training, noting that foster parents and other placement providers are not adequately prepared to appropriately care for children exhibiting difficult behavioral issues, resulting in placement disruptions.

Stakeholders were particularly concerned about the current practices with regard to disciplining children and adolescents in foster homes, group homes, and shelter facilities. In addition, some stakeholders suggested that the training approved for private agencies may be of lesser quality than the training offered by the State agency. In addition, stakeholders noted that relative caregivers receive an abbreviated version of the training curriculum that is offered to non-relative foster parents.

### VIII. SERVICE ARRAY

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
		1	2 X	3

Rhode Island did not achieve substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. Information on the items assessed for this factor during the CFSR is presented below.

**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       Area Needing Improvement

Item 35 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because although there is a wide array of services in place, there are service gaps in key areas that impact safety, permanency and well-being of children.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF offers a wide array of services. This includes several community-based prevention programs and neighborhood-based family support/resource centers, family preservation programs, services for physical and mental health needs, and placement services (e.g., residential care, independent living programs). The Statewide Assessment also identifies the following additional services and programs: anger management/domestic violence services; supervised visitation; transportation;

interpreter services; housing assistance; mental health evaluation and counseling; sexual abuse evaluations and treatment; sexual offender treatment; inpatient and outpatient substance abuse evaluation and counseling; diversionary programs and supports for wayward youths; and services for high risk youthful offenders.

According to the Statewide Assessment, promising programs in the area of substance abuse include: the Vulnerable Infants Program for drug exposed infants and their mothers; Project Connect, which provides comprehensive wraparound services; and the Family Treatment Drug Court. Programs designed to address physical and mental health needs include: CEDARRS for children with special needs, Child and Adolescent Service System Program providing wraparound services for children with serious emotional disturbances, Children's Intensive Services providing outpatient counseling and support for children with serious emotional and/or behavioral disturbances, and Managed Networks, a continuum of services to youth as they progress through levels of care to ensure placement in the least restrictive setting.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that DCYF has a range of placement services, including: family foster care, therapeutic foster care; group homes; residential treatment; independent living programs; and emergency shelters. Strong efforts have been underway for the past several years to increase capacity across the spectrum of placements. There has been an increase of 109 percent in the availability of specialized therapeutic foster care since 2000.

The Statewide Assessment notes several programs that have been highly effective in improving the safety and permanency of children, including:

- Comprehensive Emergency Services (CES) program (a crisis stabilization and program referral service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with 86 percent of involved families showing improvement using the North Carolina Family Assessment Scale);
- Partners in Permanency (a concurrent planning service model which began as a demonstration project and, although small, has shown great success in improving permanency outcomes);
- Families Together Therapeutic Visitation Program (receiving national recognition for its methods of supporting healthy interaction between parents and children); and
- Family Support Project (in partnership with the Rhode Island/Hasbro Children's Hospital, provides family-centered intervention in situations where child sexual abuse has been disclosed).

The Statewide Assessment also identifies programs designed to address the needs of wayward/disobedient youth and youthful offenders, including:

- Project Hope (supporting youth discharged from the Training School).
- Juvenile Justice Host Home Project (intervention and respite homes for wayward/disobedient youth);
- Safe Streets (intensive monitoring for high risk youthful offenders);

- Article 23 (designed to provide services to wayward/disobedient youth to prevent them coming into care); and
- Juvenile Drug Court (fosters rehabilitation and accountability in substance abusing youth and their families).

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, despite this array of services, stakeholders participating in focus groups convened as part of the State’s self-assessment process reported that there are insufficient services in many areas of the State to meet the needs of children and families. Services that are not readily available include: intensive home-based reunification services; therapeutic recreation and respite; services for developmentally-delayed children or children with serious emotional disturbances; services to meet the needs of parents with mental retardation or dual-diagnosed parents; treatment services for non-adjudicated sex offenders; services and placements for sex offenders transitioning from residential placement or from the Training School; services for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, or transgender youth; services for adolescent parents; adoption services to prevent adoption disruptions or dissolutions; and outreach and tracking programs for youth. Focus group participants also reported a lack of language-appropriate services.

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that there is an array of services available to meet a range of needs. In particular, stakeholders noted that the increased availability of residential services within the State has led to a reduction in the number of children and youth placed out-of-State. Some stakeholders also noted the effectiveness of services such as TIDES and Children’s Intensive Services (CIS). In addition, stakeholders noted that the State has supportive Independent Living services that even provide for exceptional expenses (e.g., driving lessons, class rings). Some stakeholders also noted the expansion of post-adoption services through other agencies (e.g., Casey Foundation, Children’s Friends). Other stakeholders noted the passing of Article 23 by the Legislature that allows DCYF to design community based services for wayward children and youth to prevent entry into foster care. Stakeholders also reported use of a non-traditional effort to monitor juveniles on probation called Safe Streets.

Despite the array of existing services, stakeholders reported that there are many service gaps in the State. Of particular concern to stakeholders is the lack of foster home placements, as well as the lack of support services for foster parents. They also expressed concern about the lack of substance abuse treatment services for both youth and adults. Other stakeholders commented on the need for more in-home/post-reunification support services. Service gaps also were identified in the following areas:

- Culturally and language appropriate services;
- Mental health services;
- Affordable housing;
- Sexual offender treatment; and
- Services for deaf and/or blind children.

**Item 36. The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State’s CFSP.**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

Item 36 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the CFSR found that the availability of key services varies by region and that long waiting lists for some services impede the timely delivery of services to parents and children, negatively impacting safety, permanency, and well-being.

According to the Statewide Assessment a spectrum of services is generally available statewide but service gaps do exist and the availability of services vary by region. The Statewide Assessment also reports that there are waiting lists for a number of services, including home based services and specialized adoption services. Also noted was a severe shortage of placement resources, with stakeholder focus groups convened for the Statewide Assessment identifying a need for more targeted recruitment in order to maintain children in their own communities. Focus groups also reported a lack of transportation, especially in the South County area.

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that necessary services are not accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions in the State. Stakeholders in North Kingstown and Pawtucket reported that families in rural and suburban areas have less access to services than do families in urban areas, due in large part to a lack of transportation to access services. Some North Kingstown stakeholders also noted that their region lacks many of the services available in more urban areas of the State and that working-poor families’ access to services may be limited, as families with minimal health insurance often are ineligible to receive community-based services yet also have great difficulty accessing private services.

Furthermore, stakeholders across the State expressed concern that long waiting lists for many services limit access to those services. Service delays can be up to 3 months. In particular, stakeholders singled out waiting lists for CIS, parenting education classes, home-based services, post-reunification services, and substance abuse treatment. They also noted that despite a large array of Independent Living Services, youths frequently encounter waiting lists for Lifeskills classes. Stakeholders expressed concern that the waiting lists cause delays in service provision and that delays in service provision have a negative impact on the ability of the agency to ensure children’s safety while they remain in their homes.

**Item 37. The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

Item 37 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although the State can individualize services to meet the unique needs of some children and families, the CFSR determined that this is not consistent across the spectrum of children served by DCYF. While the State has successfully developed a number of effective approaches for tailoring services for children with high-end needs, the ability to do so for children who have not yet reached this level of intense need is inconsistent.

The Statewide Assessment notes the many effective efforts by the State to individualize services for children with intensive service or specialized placement needs, such as the use of Care Management Teams (CMTs) and the Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP). According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF presently provides most of its services through contracts with outside providers. When services are needed beyond the range of the contracted services and placements, DCYF purchases services through individualized contracts with providers that can deliver a higher level of care. The Statewide Assessment also notes that DCYF is attempting to institutionalize family-centered practice fully, a central tenet of which is the development of individualized case plans. However, this has not yet been fully realized.

Despite the efforts of DCYF to individualize services through family-centered practice, many stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite review reported that family-centered practice is not consistently used throughout the State and services are not being routinely individualized for children and families. Some stakeholders noted that the difficulty in individualizing services may be attributed to a lack of flexible funding and to authorization difficulties. In addition, some stakeholders indicated that the resources to individualize services tend to vary considerably by region.

Stakeholders noted, however, that there is special funding, such as enhanced CASSP funding that allows individualized services (e.g., wraparound services) for children and youth who have significant needs and the Child-By-Child Program that targets children whose placement is outside of the State in order to bring them home or back to an in-State placement. In addition, Providence stakeholders reported that services such as independent living are highly individualized.

**IX. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY**

<b>Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity</b>				
	<b>Not in Substantial Conformity</b>		<b>Substantial Conformity</b>	
Rating	1	<b>2 X</b>	3	4

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. Information pertaining to the items assessed for this factor is provided below.

**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      Area Needing Improvement

Item 38 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although DCYF makes efforts to solicit input and regularly partner with the community, there is very limited collaboration with the Family Court, a key stakeholder in implementing the provisions of the CFSP.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF obtains community input in a number of ways. Over the last few years the agency has held a series of public forums to solicit input on specific initiatives and changes in policy and practice to augment service delivery and improve outcomes. DCYF also holds an annual Foster Parent Town Meeting to solicit feedback. The agency supports a Youth/Parent Partnership to involve families in designing consumer-driven services, and participates in a partnership of community groups to coordinate training opportunities. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, the Narragansett Tribe reports having a good working relationship and regular communication with the agency. DCYF and the Family Court are actively working to foster effective communication and coordination, with the intention of resolving long-rooted differences in perspective on child welfare issues.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR were in general agreement that DCYF engages in ongoing consultation with multiple community partners. Stakeholders described the agency’s many collaborative efforts with community partners (e.g., Ready to Learn, Project Connect, the Tribe, the Children’s Museum, and the Child Advocacy Center). Another example of strong collaboration cited by stakeholders is the weekly meetings between Children’s Hospital staff and agency staff regarding cases they have handled that week. In addition, the Safe Streets program was cited as an example of the agency’s collaborative efforts with law

enforcement. Some stakeholders also indicated that foster parents participate on agency committees and have a good relationship with DCYF.

Several stakeholders, however, expressed concern about the inadequate level of collaboration between the Courts and DCYF and the often adversarial relationship between them. In general, stakeholder comments on this issue suggest that there are long-standing tensions between the court and DCYF that both sides recognize. This includes DCYF concerns about the level of control exerted by the courts over case planning decisions in DCYF, and court concerns about DCYF's responsiveness to the court's authority. The amount of time that DCYF staff spend in court is a significant concern for the agency, a situation exacerbated by the large number of specialty courts in the State. The court has tried to address this in Providence by setting up a room at the court where DCYF staff can work and more effectively utilize their time while awaiting hearings. DCYF has also made efforts to address the problems by having one senior staff member work with the court when problems arise. Despite some gains in this area, the general perception of stakeholders is that the relationship needs continued strengthening and more systematic coordination efforts.

**Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP.**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

Item 39 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although many stakeholders acknowledged having generally good working relationships with the agency, several key stakeholders reported having little input into the State Plan and annual reports of progress and services delivered.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, DCYF regularly holds public forums on relevant topics related to systemic change and how to better achieve goals and objectives. The Department reports on these activities in the Annual Progress and Services Report.

State-level stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR indicated that DCYF's effort to involve community partners in the development of the plan varies across partners. Stakeholder comments indicate that some key community partners, particularly the Tribe, are not officially consulted or are consulted only after the State plan is prepared. However, other stakeholders noted that they participate in committees established to provide input in DCYF's plans.

**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        X   Area Needing Improvement

This item is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although there is strong collaboration among agency leadership in Rhode Island to coordinate a range of Federal and federally assisted programs, that collaboration does not consistently filter down to service provision at the local level.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF is an integral partner in implementing the statewide strategies identified in the January 2003 report, *Toward an Organized System of Care for Rhode Island’s Children, Youth and Families*. Implementation of the statewide strategies was designated as a priority of the Governor’s Children’s Cabinet. DCYF also coordinates with a number of partners to further its mission, including:

- Department of Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals (MHRH), Division of Developmental Disabilities - to increase in-state placement capacity;
- Department of Human Services (DHS), the state’s Medicaid Authority - to provide health insurance and behavioral health services, and to fund placement settings for parenting DCYF teens;
- Adult Probation and Parole and the Providence Police Department - to provide intensive evening and weekend monitoring of youthful offenders through the “Safe Streets Providence” program; and
- The Family Court – to facilitate efforts with the Family Treatment Drug Court program and the Juvenile Drug Court.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, DCYF’s educational services coordinator represents the agency on Department of Education planning initiatives and committees, and liaises with school and DCYF staff to resolve issues related to educational services for children in care. The Statewide Assessment notes that DCYF’s relationship with the Local Education Agencies (LEAs) varies, and is based on individual contacts and relationships as opposed to formalized agreements between DCYF and the LEAs. The Statewide Assessment also notes that there are sometimes delays in enrollment and difficulty with the transfer of records. Additionally, the State reports that continuity in educational placements (as mandated by state law) and agency-school collaboration on planning and service delivery needs to be improved.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR indicated that there are efforts in place to coordinate services. However, several stakeholders reported that there are barriers to services coordination, including DCYF staff workload size. They also noted that efforts to comply with HIPPA are starting to impede collaboration due to confidentiality issues. Stakeholders reported that DCYF coordinates with other agencies at the State level better than at the local levels. They noted that the Governor’s Children’s

Cabinet, a State level body designed to coordinate systems across Departments, meets on a regular basis. Stakeholders also commented that DCYF efforts to coordinate internal programming (i.e., Juvenile Justice, Mental Health, and Child Welfare) were strongest at the agency leadership level. However, stakeholders noted that these efforts at collaboration, both internal and across agencies, were uneven at the local level, resulting in mixed experiences in coordination. In particular, stakeholders cited the lack of coordination and communication at the local level between DCYF’s own units, which are not integrated and have differing approaches to their work.

**X. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION**

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
Rating	1	2 X	3	4

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor pertaining to Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention. Information pertaining to the items assessed for this factor is provided below.

**Item 41. The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.**

  X   Strength             Area Needing Improvement

Item 41 is rated as a Strength because DCYF has developed and implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions in accordance with recommended national standards.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF has standards for foster family homes, adoptive homes, and child care institutions. Child care regulations were last updated in 1987, and foster home regulations were last revised in 1998. Standards for day care homes, group care facilities, and foster care homes are currently being revised to ensure compliance with ASFA. It is noted that licensing workers have an average caseload of 160 families, which prevents them from visiting foster families more than once a year. Licensing staff also are responsible for monitoring placements in group care facilities

The Statewide Assessment notes that State law recently was changed to permit licenses to be renewed every 2 years instead of annually. The Statewide Assessment also notes that although historically, adoptive homes have been approved, not licensed, DCYF is moving toward the licensing of DCYF adoptive homes, which would require a fire inspection.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR affirmed that licensing standards are in place for foster/adoptive homes and child-placing agencies. However, some stakeholders reported that there may be delays in licensing, for up to one year. Stakeholders indicated that a lack of regular communication between the central office and the regions may contribute to delays. Some stakeholders also noted that there may be a 2-3 month delay in biennial re-licensing, although at the time of the CFSR review, stakeholders reported only 30 out of approximately 1000 foster homes were overdue for renewal of their licenses. This is primarily due to losses in licensing staff and the very large caseloads reported to be carried by licensing staff.

**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       Area Needing Improvement

Item 42 is rated as a Strength because the CFSR determined that standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving IV-E or IVB funds.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF applies the same quality standards to relative, non-relative, kinship care, and adoptive homes. Historically, adoptive and relative foster homes have not been licensed, merely subject to approval. However, the same licensing standards now apply to all caregivers. DCYF is working on ensuring that all pre-adoptive homes are licensed, and on developing a uniform licensing packet for all providers.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue for the onsite CFSR indicated that at present, the standards are applied equally to licensed foster families licensed by the State and private agencies, adoptive families, and relative homes. In addition, stakeholders indicate that waiver of licensing standards may be granted on a case-by-case basis for training of relative foster homes upon the recommendation of the caseworker and based on “hardship.” Some stakeholders also noted that Native American foster homes are licensed by the Tribe unless non-Native American children are placed in the home, in which case the home must be licensed by the State.

**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       Area Needing Improvement

Item 43 is rated as a Strength because the CFSR found that DCYF enforces stringent criminal background clearance requirements that are completed for all foster and adoptive applicants.

According to the Statewide Assessment, every applicant, including those in private child placing agencies, must be cleared by Federal and State background checks. Efficiency in completing checks is average given the large volume conducted. One barrier identified on a statewide basis is that local police departments have been inconsistent in conducting fingerprinting and background checks of foster parent applicants in a timely fashion.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, the Rhode Island statute is more stringent than the Federal guidelines, which disqualify an applicant for a drug felony within the past 5 years. In contrast, Rhode Island applicants are disqualified if they are currently under arrest for, or have ever been convicted of, a felony drug offense.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR were in general agreement that criminal background checks are completed for foster/adoptive and relative placements. They noted that thorough background checks are conducted during the licensing and re-licensing process.

**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.**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

Item 44 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. The CFSR determined that DCYF does not have an adequate process in place to ensure the 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.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF employs multiple strategies to increase recruitment. These include: (1) partnering with community churches in a “faith-based initiative”; (2) contracting with Adoption Rhode Island (ARI) and the Urban League of Rhode Island for recruitment of adoptive/foster homes, including maintaining a photo listing of children on their websites; (3) funding the Rhode Island Foster Parent’s Association to support recruitment efforts; (4) featuring a Tuesday’s Child on a local television station; (5) holding an annual Adoption Conference and several other events throughout the year to publicize the need for adoptive families; and (6) advertising in majority and minority newspapers, on bus tails, TV and radio spots; and (7) recruitment parties.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that targeted recruitment efforts are conducted to reach specific populations, such as minority groups, pediatric nurses, and potential foster parents for specific groups of children (i.e., developmentally-disabled children, medically-fragile children, and adolescents). Recruitment for special needs children tends to occur on an as-needed basis, with resources explored within the child’s community of origin, educational setting, social circles, etc. Targeted, geographical recruitment is also conducted.

However, as indicated in the Statewide Assessment, DCYF struggles with recruiting potential foster or adoptive parents. This is largely due to a shortage of agency resources allocated to this task. One staff person is responsible for recruitment activities, which inhibits making more face-to-face contacts with potential families and limits ongoing support for new families. Although some progress has been made in recruiting Spanish-speaking families the need still exists for more, as well as for African American adoptive parents.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR indicated that although DCYF has established recruitment efforts to recruit/retain foster homes that reflect the ethnic diversity of the foster care population, these efforts vary in intensity across the State. State level stakeholders noted that while there are Statewide efforts to recruit ethnically/racially diverse foster homes, there are still difficulties recruiting foster homes to meet the placement needs of children, particularly older African American males and Native American children. Providence County stakeholders reported that the agency has contracts with private agencies to recruit foster families. In contrast, Pawtucket stakeholders suggested that recruitment in that location occurs primarily through informal word-of-mouth efforts on the part of foster parents. However, Pawtucket stakeholders also noted that there are cultural barriers to recruiting certain populations and a lack of racial/ethnic matching. Stakeholders also reported that the Rhode Island Foster Parent Association (RIFPA) operates a foster parent mentoring program, and most expressed the opinion that it is an effective program. Stakeholders also noted that Adoption Rhode Island is an effective program but that most other efforts to recruit homes for African American children are generally perceived as ineffective.

**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      Area Needing Improvement

Item 45 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because although a process is in place for the use of cross-jurisdictional resources, it is not an effective process for facilitating permanency for waiting children. The CFSR found that overall efforts in this area are impaired by caseworkers' reluctance to make inter-jurisdictional placements.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF is working to increase the opportunities for cross-jurisdictional placements for children in foster care. The Statewide Assessment also notes that registering children on the AdoptUSKids website is a priority for DCYF and although only four children are currently registered, DCYF staff will be receiving training and technical assistance from AdoptUSKids on the registration process. In addition, discussions are currently taking place between DCYF and the child welfare agencies in Connecticut and Massachusetts to facilitate inter-state recruitment and placements.

State-level stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR noted that DCYF uses multiple resources to achieve adoptive placements, such as Adoption Rhode Island, Tuesday's Child, and adoption home parties and events. However, several State-level stakeholders also indicated that caseworkers and supervisors are resistant to registering children on AdoptUSKids for a number of reasons, including fear of children's needs not being met, loss of control, concern about moving children away from siblings, and concern regarding the quality of home studies conducted by other States. Stakeholders reported that, while some children are listed on AdoptUSKids, many more children could be listed on the website. Some stakeholders noted that caseworker attitude makes the difference.

Some stakeholders also cited caseworker reluctance to place children out of State as a serious barrier to the placement of older children or children with special needs, and cited specific examples of lost placement opportunities due to caseworker reluctance. Local site stakeholders expressed concern that the requirements of ICPC relative home studies delay timely placement, as other States have more extensive training requirements for relatives than does Rhode Island.