

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Final Report: Oregon Child and Family Services Review
February 2008

INTRODUCTION

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

The Oregon CFSR was conducted the week of September 10, 2007. The period under review for the case reviews was from April 1, 2006, to September 10, 2007. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Child, Adult and Families Division (CAF) of the Oregon Department of Human Services
- The State Data Profile, prepared by CB, which provides State child welfare data for fiscal year (FY) 2003, FY 2004, and FY 2005
- Reviews of 65 cases (41 foster care cases¹ and 24 in-home services cases) at three sites throughout the State, including 31 cases in Multnomah County, 17 cases in Deschutes County, and 17 cases in Marion 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, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, and attorneys

Background Information

The CFSR assesses State performance on 23 items relevant to seven outcomes and 22 items pertaining to seven systemic factors. In the Systemic Factors section of the report, each item incorporated in each systemic factor is rated as either a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement, based on whether State performance on the item meets Federal policy requirements. Information relevant to each item comes from the Statewide Assessment and the stakeholder interviews conducted during the week of the Onsite Review. The overall rating for the systemic factors is based on the ratings for the individual items incorporated in the systemic factor. For any given systemic factor, a State is rated as being either in substantial conformity with that factor (i.e., a score of 3 or 4) or not in substantial conformity with that factor (a score of 1 or 2).

¹ The CFSR usually includes 40 foster care cases and 25 in-home services cases. However, during the Onsite Review, it was discovered that one of the in-home services cases involved a child who was in foster care. Therefore, the case was designated as a foster care case.

Items relevant to the seven outcomes are discussed in the Outcomes section of the report. An overall rating of Strength or Area Needing Improvement is assigned to each of the 23 items, depending on the percentage of cases that receive a Strength rating in the case reviews. An item is assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed are rated as a Strength. Performance ratings for each of the seven outcomes are based on item ratings for each case. A State may be rated as having Substantially Achieved, Partially Achieved, or Not Achieved the outcome. The determination of whether a State is in substantial conformity with a particular outcome is based on the percentage of cases that were determined to have substantially achieved the outcome. Specifically, for a State to be in substantial conformity with an outcome, 95 percent of the cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome. A State that is not in substantial conformity with a particular outcome must develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address the areas of concern associated with that outcome.

ACF has set very high standards of performance for the CFSR. The standards are based on the belief that because child welfare agencies work with our country's most vulnerable children and families, only the highest standards of performance should be acceptable. The focus of the CFSR process is on continuous quality improvement, and high standards are set to ensure ongoing attention to the goal of achieving positive outcomes for children and families with regard to safety, permanency, and well-being.

It should be noted, however, that States are not required to attain the 95 percent standard established for the CFSR Onsite Review at the end of their PIP implementation. ACF recognizes that the kinds of systemic and practice changes necessary to bring about improvement in particular outcome areas often are time-consuming to implement. Also, improvements are likely to be incremental rather than dramatic. Instead, States work with ACF to establish a specified amount of improvement or implement specified activities for their PIPs. That is, for each outcome or item that is an Area Needing Improvement, each State (working in conjunction with CB) specifies how much improvement the State will demonstrate and/or the activities that it will implement to address the Areas Needing Improvement and determines the procedures for demonstrating the achievement of these goals. Both the improvements specified and the procedures for demonstrating improvement vary across States. Therefore, a State can meet the requirements of its PIP and still not perform at the 95 percent (for outcomes) or 90 percent (for items) level as required by the CFSR.

The second round of the CFSR assesses a State's current level of functioning with regard to achieving desired child and family outcomes by once more applying high standards and a consistent, comprehensive case-review methodology. This is intended to serve as a basis for continued planning in areas in which the State still needs to improve. The goal is to ensure that program improvement is an ongoing process and does not end with the closing of the PIP.

Because many changes have been made in the onsite CFSR process based on lessons learned during the first round and in response to feedback from the child welfare field, a State's performance in the second round of the CFSR is not directly comparable to its performance in the first round, particularly with regard to comparisons of percentages. Key changes in the CFSR process that make it difficult to compare performances across reviews are the following:

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

Key CFRS Findings Regarding Outcomes

The 2007 CFRS identified three areas of high performance in Oregon with regard to achieving outcomes for children. The State achieved overall ratings of Strength for the individual indicators pertaining to foster care reentry (item 5), placing children in close proximity to their parents (item 11), and placement with siblings (item 12).

The CFRS identified several areas of concern with regard to achieving outcomes for children and families. The State did not meet the two national standards for the safety-related data indicators—one pertaining to recurrence of maltreatment within a 6-month period and one pertaining to maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff members. The State also did not meet the national standards for any of the four data composites pertaining to permanency. These include the timeliness and permanency of reunification (Permanency Composite 1), the timeliness of adoptions (Permanency Composite 2), achieving permanency for children in foster care for long periods of time (Permanency Composite 3), and placement stability (Permanency Composite 4).

In addition, case review findings indicated the following:

- Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations) was substantially achieved in only 46.3 percent of the cases reviewed.
- Well-Being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs) was substantially achieved in only 38.5 percent of the cases.
- Safety Outcome 2 (Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate) was substantially achieved in only 60.0 percent of the cases.
- Safety Outcome 1 (Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect) was substantially achieved in only 62.5 percent of the cases.

The State's low performance with regard to child outcomes may be due, in part, to a lack of key services and to delays in service provision across the State. Concerns about service delays and gaps were particularly apparent with regard to mental health services, substance abuse treatment services, and affordable services for parents without health insurance. The scarcity of services was found to affect the State's effectiveness in maintaining children safely in their own homes. Case review findings indicated that many children remained at risk of harm in their own homes because the services provided to the families often were not sufficient to address all of the safety and risk issues in the home. Both the case reviews and stakeholder interviews indicated that, although needs assessments generally are conducted, the services recommended through the assessments are not always provided, often because of a scarcity of

these services. Lack of sufficient substance abuse treatment services for parents also was identified as a concern with regard to achieving permanency for children in a timely manner, and lack of sufficient mental health services for children was noted to contribute to a lack of placement stability for many children in the cases reviewed.

Another key finding, as noted in the Statewide Assessment, is that Oregon began a new statewide practice in March 2007 called the Oregon Safety Model (OSM) to address safety concerns. This model was intended to provide caseworkers with critical thinking tools to better assess the key factors necessary to develop in-home safety and service plans and to determine if children can be maintained safely in their own homes. However, stakeholders reported that the OSM is not being implemented consistently across the State.

The State's low performance on many of the outcomes also may be attributed, in part, to the lack of frequent and meaningful contact between caseworkers and the children and parents in their caseloads. Caseworker contacts with children were found to be of sufficient frequency and quality in only 55 percent of the cases reviewed, and contacts with parents were found to be of sufficient frequency and quality in only 39 percent of the cases reviewed. This lack of contact makes it difficult to ensure children's safety while they are in their own homes or in foster homes, and it also makes it difficult to engage parents of children in foster care in services to meet the requirements of their case plan so that children can return home. In addition, the case reviews found that parents and age-appropriate children were involved in case planning in only 44 percent of the cases.

Another key issue identified in the Oregon CFSR pertained to the safety of children in foster care. Not only did the State not meet the national standard for the data indicator pertaining to maltreatment in foster care, but in 6 (15 percent) of the 41 applicable foster care cases, reviewers indicated that there were maltreatment concerns in the foster home and that these concerns were not adequately addressed by the agency. A related concern was voiced by stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSR, who indicated that in many areas of the State, foster homes are operating over capacity. These stakeholders said that "exceptions" to the policy are routinely sought and approved because of the extreme shortages of foster homes. They also noted that, although policy requires that foster homes operating over capacity be monitored every 90 days, there is no way of tracking the homes that have more than the required number of children and, therefore, there is no way of ensuring that the 90-day monitoring visits are being made.

Key CFSR Findings Regarding Systemic Factors

With regard to systemic factors, Oregon was found to be in substantial conformity with the factors of Quality Assurance System, Training, and Agency Responsiveness to the Community. Oregon was not in substantial conformity with the systemic factors of Statewide Information System; Case Review System; Service Array; and Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention.

The specific 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 with regard to the seven systemic factors assessed through the CFSR. In the following section, key findings are summarized for each

outcome and systemic factor. Information also is provided about the State's performance on each outcome and systemic factor during the 2001 CFSR.

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 the recurrence of substantiated or indicated maltreatment (item 2).

Oregon did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 62.5 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. Performance varied across sites. The outcome was substantially achieved in 89 percent of Marion County cases, compared to 55 percent of Multnomah and Deschutes County cases.

Oregon also did not meet the national standards for the two data indicators relevant for Safety Outcome 1. These indicators pertain to the absence of maltreatment recurrence and the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.

Oregon did not achieve substantial conformity for Safety Outcome 1 during its first CFSR conducted in FY 2001. The following key concerns were noted in the 2001 CFSR:

- A lengthy screening process delayed assignment of cases to an intake caseworker.
- There was inadequate documentation in the case files of the intake and investigation timelines.
- Repeat maltreatment was found in some of the in-home services cases.

To address these concerns, Oregon implemented the following strategies during its PIP:

- Developed specialized data reports regarding timeliness of investigations and repeat maltreatment and disseminated them to the field to be used to monitor performance in these areas
- Revised agency policy to ensure consistent practice with regard to screening maltreatment reports and determining dispositions
- Supported implementation of new policies and practices through developing online applications of the new tools and procedures and incorporating them into the agency's information technology system
- Provided staff training for current staff on the new policies and also incorporated this training into the training for new caseworkers

The key concerns identified in Oregon's 2001 CFSR were not found in the 2007 CFSR for Safety Outcome 1. In particular, few cases in 2007 involved concerns regarding the timeliness of the screening process and assigning cases for investigation. The key concerns

identified in the 2007 CFSSR pertained to a lack of timely initiation of investigations. Most (77 percent) of the cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement for timeliness of investigation involved reports that were given a 5-day timeframe for initiation of response.

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 issue of child welfare agency efforts to prevent children's removal 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 efforts to reduce the risk of harm to the children.

Oregon did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 60 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. Performance on this item varied across sites. The outcome was substantially achieved in 76 percent of Marion County cases, 55 percent of Multnomah County cases, and 53 percent of Deschutes County cases.

Oregon did not achieve substantial conformity for Safety Outcome 2 in the 2001 CFSSR. The following concerns relevant to this item were noted in the 2001 CFSSR:

- In some cases, services did not address pertinent risk factors such as co-occurring drug and alcohol abuse and domestic violence.
- There was little evidence that risk was assessed on an ongoing basis or that it was adequately assessed at case closure.
- Stakeholders expressed concern about the adequacy of safety plans.
- Stakeholders expressed concern about the availability of post-reunification support services.
- In some cases, when new potential maltreatment information was received on an open case, it was noted in the case record, but it was not formally reported or investigated.

To address these concerns, Oregon implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- Developed standards for treatment service providers requiring them to document parent behavior changes for parents in both the in-home services cases and the foster care cases, including a specific requirement that behavior changes were to be assessed for parents prior to a reunification decision
- Developed a Guided Assessment Process (GAP) and needs-planning process that includes standards, tools, and procedures for assessing safety and risk on an ongoing basis and at critical case junctures
- Revised agency policy to support comprehensive ongoing assessments and safety planning

In the 2007 CFSSR, one of the key concerns noted in the 2001 CFSSR continued to be a concern in the 2007 CFSSR. This pertains to providing services to families after reunification. Other key findings of the 2007 CFSSR were the following:

- The agency was appropriately removing children from the home without service provision to the family prior to removal due to safety concerns for the child.

- In many cases, although the agency provided services, they were not sufficient to adequately address the safety issues in the home, and the children remained at risk in their homes.
- There was a lack of adequate safety and risk assessments in the child's home and in the foster home.

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 efforts to prevent foster care reentry (item 5), ensure placement stability for children in foster care (item 6), and establish appropriate permanency goals for children in foster care in a timely manner (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 to ensure that children who have Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) as a case goal are in stable placements and adequately prepared for eventual independent living (item 10).

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

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 46.3 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity.
- The State Data Profile indicates that Oregon did not meet the national standards for any of the four data composites.

Oregon's performance on the individual measures included in each composite is presented in the discussion of the items related to each measure. Although Oregon's performance on this outcome was low in all sites, there was variation across sites. The outcome was found to be substantially achieved in 60 percent of Deschutes County cases, 50 percent of Marion County cases, and 38 percent of Multnomah County cases.

Oregon did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1 in its 2001 CFSR. The following concerns were identified in the 2001 CFSR:

- Some reunification decisions were not based on a determination that a substantial change had occurred in the family, thus potentially increasing the likelihood of reentry.
- There were insufficient post-reunification services to prevent reentry.
- There were delays in establishing permanency goals in a timely manner that were attributed to changes in caseworker assignments and the lack of concurrent planning. Even when concurrent goals were established, caseworkers often did not work toward the goals simultaneously.
- Children were in foster care for long periods of time prior to a finalized adoption due to delays in adoption home studies, delays in the paperwork required for finalization after termination of parental rights (TPR), and insufficient legal assistance prior to TPR.
- When efforts to reunify were continued for long periods of time without success, the plan often was changed to a goal of APPLA "by default" rather than the agency considering other possible options. The APPLA plan often was established because concurrent

