

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Final Report: Arkansas Child and Family Services Review
December 2008

INTRODUCTION

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Arkansas. 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 (HHS) 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 HHS.

The Arkansas CFSR was conducted the week of January 28, 2008. The period under review for the case reviews was from October 1, 2006, to January 28, 2008. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) of the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS)
- The State Data Profile, prepared by CB, which provides State data for fiscal year (FY) 2004, FY 2005, and the CFSR 12-month target period ending March 31, 2006
- Reviews of 65 cases at 3 sites across the State: 31 cases in Pulaski County, 17 cases in Pope County, and 17 cases in St. Francis 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 agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, and attorneys

Information from each resource is presented for all of the items reviewed.

Background Information

The CFSR assesses State performance on 23 items relevant to 7 outcomes and 22 items pertaining to 7 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 (ANI), 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 CFSR. The overall

rating for each 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).

Items relevant to the seven outcomes are discussed in the Outcomes Section of the report. An overall rating of Strength or ANI 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 or systemic factor must develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address the areas of concern associated with that outcome or systemic factor.

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; 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. CB 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 CB to establish a specified amount of improvement or implement specified activities for their PIP. That is, for each outcome or item that is an ANI, 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 ANIs 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 performance 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

CFSR Findings Regarding Outcomes

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with any of the seven CFSR outcomes. The State did achieve overall ratings of Strength for the following individual indicators:

- Repeat maltreatment (item 2)
- Foster care re-entry (item 5)
- Placing children in close proximity to their parents (item 11)

Additionally, Arkansas met the national standard for the measure assessing the absence of maltreatment recurrence, Permanency Composite 1 (Timeliness and permanency of reunification) and for Permanency Composite 3 (Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods).

Arkansas did not meet the national standards for the measure pertaining to the absence of maltreatment in foster care. The State also did not meet the national standards for the measures pertaining to the timeliness of adoptions (Permanency Composite 2) and placement stability (Permanency Composite 4).

The CFSR identified several areas of concern with regard to achieving outcomes for children and families. Safety Outcome 2 (Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate) was determined to be Substantially Achieved in 58 percent of the cases reviewed. Arkansas's lowest rating within Safety Outcome 2 was 61 percent for risk assessment and safety management (item 4).

Permanency Outcome 2 (Continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved) was determined to be Substantially Achieved in 53.9 percent of the cases reviewed. Arkansas's lowest rating within Permanency Outcome 2 was for item 16, which pertains to the relationship of the child in foster care with parents. Reviewers determined that DCFS made diligent efforts to support or maintain the bond between children in foster care and their mothers and fathers through efforts other than arranging visitation in only 48 percent of the cases reviewed.

Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations) was determined to be Substantially Achieved in only 41.0 percent of the cases reviewed. Within Permanency Outcome 1, Arkansas's lowest rating was for item 9, which pertains to achieving adoptions in a timely manner (33 percent). Performance on this item may be attributed, at least in part, to delays due to the agency not filing for termination of parental rights (TPR) in a timely manner or not requesting a court hearing for a finalized adoption and staff not completing necessary paperwork to complete the adoption. Item 10, which pertains to whether the agency has made or was making diligent efforts to assist children in attaining their goals related to another planned permanent living arrangement (OPPLA), was rated low at 57 percent. This was attributed, at least in part, to the agency not providing the child with sufficient services to assist in transitioning to independent living (IL).

Concerns also were identified with regard to Well-Being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs), which was determined to be Substantially Achieved in 27.7 percent of the cases. Within Well-Being 1, Arkansas's performance on all items was low. Item 17, which pertains to meeting the needs of children, parents, and foster parents, was rated a Strength in 37 percent of the cases; item 18, child and family involvement in case planning, was rated as a Strength in 31 percent of the applicable cases; item 19, caseworker visits with child, was rated as a Strength in 46 percent of the cases; and item 20, worker visits with parents, was rated as a Strength in only 33 percent of the cases.

CFSR Findings Regarding Systemic Factors

With regard to systemic factors, Arkansas was found to be in substantial conformity with two of the seven systemic factors: Statewide Information System and Agency Responsiveness to the Community.

Stakeholders noted that the Statewide Information System can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, placement, and goals of every child who is in foster care. The system is available at all hours of the day, and DCFS staff can access the system easily.

Arkansas also is in substantial conformity for the Agency Responsiveness to the Community systemic factor. The general finding in the 2008 CFSR was that the State includes the input of stakeholders in the development of Annual Progress and Services Reports

(APSRs). The CFSR found that there is coordination between DCFS and other Federally-assisted programs to meet the service needs of the children and families served by the agency. The finding in the CFSR was that the State consistently engages in ongoing consultation with key stakeholders to obtain their input regarding the goals and objectives of the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP).

Arkansas was not in substantial conformity with five of the seven systemic factors: Case Review System; Quality Assurance (QA) System, Training, Service Array, and Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention.

The key concern identified by stakeholders and case reviewers with regard to the Case Review System pertained to the inconsistent involvement and engagement of parents in developing the case plan. In addition, although the State has a process in place for filing for TPR in the cases of children who have been in foster care, both the Statewide Assessment and the Onsite Review noted that stakeholders identified concerns with timely filing or achievement of TPR. The Onsite Review did not indicate specific trends in delays; however, the Statewide Assessment attributed delays, in part, to court continuances that occur when efforts to locate absent parents, primarily fathers, are not completed in a timely manner. There is often no documentation of compelling reasons to support not pursuing TPRs.

Arkansas was not in substantial conformity with regard to the QA System. A key concern identified during the Onsite Review was that although DCFS has a QA Unit with a process that includes the use of QA reports and a supervisory case review process, the QA Unit has not been fully functioning in the past year. Additionally, the use of QA tools was not evident during the onsite CFSR. It was also unclear whether the QA system includes a comprehensive and effective monitoring process, with a clear feedback loop, of foster homes and child care institutions and child-placing agencies

With regard to Training, the State has an initial and ongoing training program; however, the onsite CFSR indicated that the enhancements to the training program have not improved practices and outcomes and that initial training for staff is not easily accessible, which further impacts service delivery. Additionally, caseworkers are sometimes assigned a full caseload prior to completing the training. Furthermore, the Onsite Review indicated that case responsibilities, travel distance, and lack of travel funds often prevent staff from receiving ongoing training. The State also has requirements for pre-service and ongoing training for prospective and current foster and adoptive families. The onsite CFSR indicated that the training for prospective and current foster and adoptive parents is not sufficiently addressing and impacting the skills and knowledge needed for the specific and individualized needs of the foster care population.

With regard to Service Array, the key concerns identified by stakeholders and case reviewers involved the demand for services exceeding resources, especially in rural areas, which often resulted in waiting lists for services and insufficient placement resources. While the statewide service delivery system is in place, service gaps do exist and were identified in some key service categories.

In addition, some areas of the State were identified as not having sufficient services to meet demands, resulting in delayed access to particular services, such as dental, medical, behavioral, and mental health services. Also, a lack of transportation reportedly affects service accessibility in some regions of the State. The State was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in 2001 and was required to address this factor in its PIP.

Arkansas was not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. A key concern identified during the Onsite Review involved how the DCFS licensing standards were applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or title IV-B funds. Although DCFS has established minimum standards for licensed family foster homes and child care institutions receiving title IV-E or title IV-B funds, the implementation and effectiveness of the minimum licensing standards were not uniformly apparent. During the Onsite Review, stakeholders reported that one group home required children to participate in religious activities or face disciplinary actions. It is unclear whether this situation is due to the lack of clarity in the Licensing Act standards regarding residents' right to practice the religion of choice or whether this situation represents a lack of adequate monitoring by the Child Welfare Agency Review Unit. Additionally, the Onsite Review indicated that DCFS does not have an effective statewide recruitment process that recruits for general or specialized foster homes that meet the needs of the children in care or that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State.

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.

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).

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be Substantially Achieved in 76.9 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. Arkansas met the national standard for the measure assessing the absence of maltreatment recurrence; however, the State did not meet the national standard for the measure assessing absence of maltreatment of children in foster care.

Arkansas was in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2001 CFSR and was not required to address the outcome in its PIP.

Findings from the 2008 CFSR indicate Arkansas struggles with the timeliness of initiating investigations (item 1). The 2008 Statewide Assessment attributed challenges with this item to the staff shortages and high caseload, which affected the ability of caseworkers to perform their jobs properly. Repeat maltreatment (item 2) was rated as a Strength in 95 percent of the cases. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State's 2001 CFSR.

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 the agency's 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 agency's efforts to reduce the risk of harm to the children.

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be Substantially Achieved in 58.5 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. There was variation in performance on this outcome across sites. The outcome was Substantially Achieved in 88 percent of Pope County cases, compared to 52 percent of Pulaski County cases and 41 percent of St. Francis County cases.

Arkansas was not in substantial conformity with this outcome for the 2001 CFSR. Both items incorporated in this outcome were rated as ANIs. A key concern identified during the 2001 CFSR was that safety and risk of children and families was not assessed and addressed in a timely manner, which resulted in children remaining at risk of harm in their homes. Additional concerns identified were risk factors that were not resolved when case closure occurred; service gaps in some areas of the State, particularly rural counties; and identified risks for which DCFS did not provide sufficient follow-up services or take appropriate actions to reduce or eliminate the risk.

The agency implemented the following action steps in its PIP as a result of the 2001 CFSR to address Safety Outcome 2:

- Ensure that risk assessments are completed through a new supervisory review process
- Strengthen the risk assessment process to ensure that risk is identified and addressed throughout the life of the case

- Strengthen the case planning process to keep children safe and prevent removal
- Ensure efficient utilization of limited resources in providing needed services to families
- Ensure that new staff are aware of available services
- Revise case planning to ensure case plans are developed to address ongoing risk and adequately address ongoing aftercare planning
- Ensure adequate services are available while child is in care and after reunification
- Ensure service staff are aware of services and how to access services for children and families

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP implementation period.

During the 2008 CFSR, both items incorporated in Safety Outcome 2 continued to be rated as ANIs. Similar to the 2001 CFSR, the 2008 CFSR found that some children were unsafe or at risk of harm in their homes because safety and risk concerns were not adequately assessed, services were not provided to address safety issues, or the services provided were insufficient to ensure the children's safety.

Additional findings of the 2008 CFSR for this outcome concerned the following:

- Ongoing assessment of the families' needs to address safety issues while the child is in the home were not consistently completed.
- The target child's siblings were not consistently assessed.
- Sufficient services to children and families to address risk of harm issues were not provided.
- There was risk of harm to children who remained in their own homes, and services necessary to reduce risk were not provided.
- Ongoing risk assessments were insufficient in the foster care setting.
- Risk was not assessed prior to or following reunification.

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 agency's efforts to prevent foster care re-entry (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 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 Other Permanent Planned Living Arrangements (OPPLA) as a case goal are in stable placements and adequately prepared for IL (item 10).

In 2008, Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was Substantially Achieved in 41 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 for the CFSR 12-month target period, the State did not meet the national standards for Permanency Composite 2 (timeliness of adoptions) and Permanency Composite 4 (placement stability).

Although the State's performance on this outcome was low in all sites, there was some variation in performance across sites. The outcome was Substantially Achieved in 47 percent of Pulaski County cases, compared to 30 percent of St. Francis County cases and 40 percent of Pope County cases.

Arkansas was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2001 CFSR. Item 10 pertaining to the permanency goal of OPPLA was rated as a Strength. All other items incorporated in the outcome were rated as ANIs. The key concerns identified in the 2001 CFSR were:

- Case reviews indicated that caseworkers had difficulty with the concurrent planning concept for families and, as a result, issues regarding adoption were not addressed until after TPR had occurred.
- Formal assessments and services were insufficient to ensure appropriate placement matches between foster homes and children in need of placement.
- Foster parents believed there was a lack of ongoing partnership and communication with DCFS, which appeared to impact placement stability.
- Lack of placement options to meet the children's individual needs hampered timely achievement of permanency goals.
- Noncustodial fathers often were not involved in permanency planning.
- Services to support adoption for older children were insufficient.
- IL assessments and services for teens were inconsistently delivered across the State.
- IL skills for youth were not adequately assessed; youth were not involved in development of services; and foster parents were not aware of the availability of IL services.
- Lack of coordination between DCFS and courts prevented appropriate and timely changes to permanency goals.

The State implemented the following strategies and action steps in its PIP to address Permanency Outcome 1:

- Increase by 10 percent the number of foster parents who will accept children and meet their special needs.
- Expand support groups and specialized training for foster parents.
- Develop an exit interview process to determine the reasons foster parents stop fostering and implement a corrective action plan to address the reasons.

- Increase uniformity of adoption services statewide by centralizing adoption field staff in order to allow adoption specialists and supervisors to focus on case planning for children with a goal of adoption.
- Train multidisciplinary teams on concurrent planning to ensure uniform practice.
- Revise the case planning process to ensure family members are involved, including noncustodial parents.
- Develop and implement case plans to move children to permanency.
- Ensure relatives are appropriately considered as placement options.

Arkansas met its target goals for this outcome before the end of the PIP implementation period.

In the 2008 CFSR, all items included in this outcome except item 5 were rated as ANIs. Related and additional key findings of the 2008 CFSR are as follows:

- Preventing foster care re-entries within a 12-month period is a strength for Arkansas (item 5).
- The Onsite Review indicated that there are issues in maintaining stable placements for foster children particularly as relates to (1) meeting their behavioral needs and (2) ensuring that their placements are safe and well-supported (item 6). In addition, the State did not meet the national standard for Permanency Composite 4: Placement Stability for the 12-month CFSR period ending March 31, 2006.
- The 2008 CFSR indicates that Arkansas does not consistently establish timely and appropriate permanency goals for children in foster care and is not consistently meeting the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requirements and filing for TPR in a timely manner (item 7). However, the State met the national standard for data Permanency Composite 3: Permanency for Children and Youth in Foster Care for Long Periods of Time.
- Information from the Onsite Review indicates DCFS did not make diligent efforts to reunify children with parents or relatives (item 8). However, the State met the national standard for data Permanency Composite 1: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification.
- Information from the review indicates that the State is not consistently completing adoptions in a timely manner (item 9). Additionally, the State did not meet the national standards for Permanency Composite 2: Timeliness of Adoptions.
- The State is not consistently assisting youth in achieving the goal of OPPLA (item 10).

Key concerns expressed in the 2008 CFSR by stakeholders with regard to Permanency Outcome 1 were:

- Re-entries into foster care occur when DCFS has had minimal involvement with the family after reunification and when services to meet the individual needs of the family after reunification have not been provided.
- DCFS is not providing placement stability for children in foster care, especially older children and children with behavioral problems. Stakeholders noted that placements of children often disrupt because the placement is based on the availability of a bed rather than on the skills and training of foster parents.

- DCFS does not monitor or provide support services to the placement providers to prevent placement disruptions.
- DCFS establishes initial permanency goals in a timely manner. However, subsequent goals are not explored thoroughly.
- Concurrent goals are not always worked on simultaneously.
- Reunification often occurs before the family is ready to reunify.
- DCFS is not aggressively moving cases to adoption. There is particular concern for the length of time between a child becoming legally free for adoption and the finalization of an adoption.
- Other placement options are not thoroughly explored prior to choosing OPPLA.

Additionally, stakeholders reported that adoptions occur more quickly for younger children than for older children. However, there has been an increase in adoptions of older children in recent years.

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

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

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was rated as Substantially Achieved in 53.9 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome did not vary significantly across sites. The outcome was determined to be Substantially Achieved in 60 percent of St. Francis County cases, 53 percent of Pulaski County cases, and 50 percent of Pope County cases.

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2 in its 2001 CFSR. All items incorporated in this outcome were rated as ANIs except for the items pertaining to placing children in close proximity to their families (item 11) and maintaining relationships between parents and children in care (item 16). The key concerns identified in the 2001 CFSR were:

- The limited number of foster homes made it difficult to place sibling groups together.
- When siblings were not placed together, there was a lack of effort to reunite siblings or to provide visitation between siblings.
- Visitation with parents and children did not occur due to DFCS's inability to provide the necessary supervision.
- There was inconsistency in following policy and procedure for maintaining contact between children in foster care and their extended relatives after TPR had occurred.

- DCFS did not consistently seek out or involve absent fathers of children who came into foster care.
- DCFS did not consistently pursue relative placements of children who came into foster care.
- Relative placements occurred, but DCFS was often not consistent in providing services or support to relatives providing care.

Arkansas implemented the following action steps in its PIP intended to address concerns of placement with siblings, preserving connections, visits with parents and siblings in foster care, and relative placement:

- Strengthen the family assessment process to ensure that quality placement and visitation decisions occur.
- Increase by 10 percent the number of foster parents who will accept sibling groups.
- Explore relative placements for individual children and sibling groups.
- Expand policy and training to address post-TPR visitation between siblings.
- Centralize the adoption function to increase the consistency of post-adoption sibling visitation.
- Implement and monitor the statewide adoption recruitment plan to increase placement options. for children.

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Key findings in the 2008 CFSR were:

- Children in the cases reviewed were in foster care placements that were in close proximity to parents or potential permanent caregivers unless specialized placements were necessary (item 11).
- DCFS is not consistent in its efforts to place siblings together (item 12).
- Visitation with mothers, fathers, and siblings was not of sufficient quality or quantity to meet the needs of the families. Visits were far more likely to occur with mothers and siblings than with fathers (item 13).
- There was a lack of consistency with regard to supporting children’s connections with extended family, siblings, school, and community connections (item 14).
- There were inconsistent efforts made to search for maternal and paternal relatives as placement resources for children (item 15).
- The support of the parents’ relationship with their children while the children were in foster care was generally inconsistent; less attention was given to promoting children’s bonds with fathers than with mothers (item 16).

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 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 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).

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be Substantially Achieved in 27.7 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.

Performance on this outcome was extremely low in all sites. The outcome was determined to be Substantially Achieved in 35 percent of Pulaski County cases and in 29 percent of Pope County cases, compared to 11 percent of St. Francis County cases. Performance also varied based on the type of case. The outcome was found to be Substantially Achieved in 38 percent (15 cases) of the 39 foster care cases and 12 percent (3 cases) of the 26 in-home services cases.

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1 in its 2001 CFSR. All items incorporated in this outcome were rated as ANIs. Key concerns identified in the 2001 CFSR were:

- Assessments conducted by caseworkers were of poor quality, with narrow focus and concentration on one family dynamic.
- Cases, primarily in-home cases, were closed prematurely due to the lack of ongoing assessments.
- There was inconsistent engagement and involvement of children, families (particularly fathers), and/or foster parents in the development of case plans.
- Caseworkers were not conducting regular visits with the child or parent in accordance with DCFS policy. The quality of many visits between caseworkers, parents, and children appeared to be unfocused and perfunctory.

Arkansas implemented the following action steps to address the concerns of the 2001 CFSR:

- Strengthen the family assessment process to ensure that service needs of children are identified and addressed in the case plan on an ongoing basis.
- Revise the case planning process to ensure the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents are coordinated between providers and that appropriate parties, including noncustodial parents, are engaged and involved in the process.
- Expand the array of services and address service gaps.
- Ensure staff members are aware of resources and services and how to access them.
- Ensure the needs of the foster parent are met by expanding current support and specialized training for foster parents.
- Revise the risk and family assessment process to include the development of a visitation plan.

The State met its target goals for these outcomes by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Similar to the 2001 CFSR, all items incorporated into this outcome were rated as ANIs in the 2008 CFSR.

The following concerns were identified in the 2008 CFSR:

- DCFS was more consistent in assessing and addressing the needs of foster parents and children than it was in assessing and meeting the service needs of mothers and fathers. Also, DCFS was more effective in assessing and addressing needs in foster care cases than it was in in-home services cases (item 17).
- Parents, particularly fathers, were not consistently involved in case planning (item 18).
- DCFS was not consistently effective in ensuring both the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with children (item 19).
- DCFS was not consistently effective in ensuring both the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with parents, particularly visits with fathers (item 20).
- Casework practice was driven by the Children's Reporting and Information System (CHRIS) and completion of forms and tools, as opposed to best practice and ongoing informal assessments.

Additional findings in 2008 for this outcome were:

- Stakeholders indicated that caseworkers are consistent in inviting parents and community partners to case planning staffings.
- The Project for Adolescent and Child Evaluation (PACE) assessments utilized for foster care children are comprehensive, with recommendations for the needs and services of foster children. However, the information obtained and the recommendations made were not regularly followed.
- In-home case reviews demonstrated a focus on the target child and lacked a comprehensive assessment and provision of services for the parents and other children in the home.
- Children often were not included in case planning activities if they were not at least 10 years old, regardless of their developmental capacity.
- Visits with mothers occurred less than once a month or not at all in 48 percent of the applicable cases.
- Visits with fathers occurred less than once a month or not at all in 81 percent of the applicable cases.

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 agency's efforts to address and meet the educational needs of children in both foster care and in-home services cases (item 21).

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. Reviewers determined that the outcome was Substantially Achieved in 71.1 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity.

The outcome was determined to be Substantially Achieved in 90 percent of Pope County cases, compared to 68 percent of Pulaski County cases and 62 percent of St. Francis County cases. There also was some variation in performance based on the type of case. The outcome was Substantially Achieved in 81 percent of the 26 applicable foster care cases compared to 46 percent of the 13 applicable in-home services cases.

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2 in its 2001 CFSR. Key concerns identified were:

- Educational needs were assessed; however, there was not evidence that the agency followed up or provided the recommended services.
- Preschool children identified as educationally delayed did not receive subsequent assessments.
- There was a lack of educational advocacy for children, specifically for alternative educational programs.
- Educational assessment and service records were not well maintained.

Arkansas implemented the following action steps to address educational needs of the child:

- Develop and implement a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Education on meeting the educational needs of children in foster care.
- Provide training to the Office of Chief Council attorneys, judges, court personnel, Attorneys *ad litem*, and CASA on meeting the needs of children in foster care.
- Provide training for caseworkers on meeting the educational needs of children served by DCFS.
- Develop policy and procedures to meet the educational needs of the children served by DCFS.
- Revise the family assessment and case planning process to ensure children's educational needs are met and services documented.

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP implementation period.

The key findings of the 2008 CFSR indicate that the concerns found in the 2001 CFSR continued to be present in the 2008 CFSR. DCFS did not adequately assess educational needs of children and, in some cases, did not pursue services even when educational needs were noted.

Additionally, although Arkansas law requires that each school system have a liaison for children in the custody of DCFS, stakeholders reported that this is not occurring in all areas. Stakeholders expressed the opinion that the school systems are hesitant to work with foster children and that there are delays of up to 1 week in getting children enrolled in school.

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

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

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was determined to be Substantially Achieved in 62.3 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was determined to be Substantially Achieved in 67 percent of Pope County cases, 63 percent of Pulaski County cases and 57 percent of St. Francis County cases. Performance varied substantially based on the type of case reviewed. The outcome was determined to be Substantially Achieved in 74 percent of the 39 foster care cases and in 33 percent of the 20 applicable in-home services cases.

The State was not in substantial conformity with this outcome for the 2001 CFSR. Key concerns identified in 2001 were:

- There were inconsistencies in the assessment and follow-up of health services for in-home cases.
- Health needs were identified in some cases, but follow-up was insufficient.
- Mental health needs often were not assessed or addressed.
- Mental health needs of children with behavioral problems often were not assessed. Additionally, their parents' mental health needs were not assessed.

Arkansas implemented the following action steps to address the physical and mental health of the child:

- Revise and strengthen the family assessment and case planning process, including in court-ordered cases.
- Provide consultation through the PACE program to all DCFS service areas not completing medical assessment follow-up to ensure recommended services are provided.
- Ensure that new caseworkers are aware of available mental health services and how to access the services.
- Increase the percentage of children in foster care receiving initial and ongoing health/medical services.
- Revise policy and procedure related to mental health services.
- Provide initial and ongoing training to caseworkers on assessing mental health issues.

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Similar to the 2001 CFSR, the physical and dental health of children (item 22) and the mental health of children (item 23) were rated as ANIs in the 2008 CFSR. The case reviews revealed inconsistency in practice with regard to the provision of health assessments of children and the obtainment of health records. There were also inconsistencies in practice with regard to assessing and addressing the mental health needs of children. The Onsite Review findings indicate that DCFS is more consistent in meeting the medical and mental health needs of children in foster care cases than in-home cases.

II. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS

Statewide Information System

Substantial conformity with the systemic factor of a 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.

Arkansas achieved substantial conformity with the systemic factor of a Statewide Information System. Arkansas also was in substantial conformity with this outcome in the 2001 CFSR. Stakeholders noted that CHRIS provides information on client demographics and the location and current status of children in foster care. CHRIS also generates management reports to track outcome measures and statistical client information.

Case Review System

Five indicators are used to assess the State's performance with regard to the systemic factor of a 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 TPR in accordance with the timeframes established by ASFA (item 28), and the notification and inclusion of foster and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers in case reviews and hearings (item 29).

Arkansas is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of a Case Review System for 2008. Arkansas was in substantial conformity with this factor during the 2001 CFSR and was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Arkansas was found to ensure that periodic reviews of the status of each child in foster care are held at least every 6 months. Judicial reviews are held every 6 months as required by State law, however, some judicial districts require reviews to occur every 3 months (item 26). In addition, permanency hearings are being held in the State 12 months from the point of the child's removal from the home, and at least every 12 months thereafter (item 27).

Despite these areas of Strength, the following concerns were noted:

- Although case plans were reported to be developed for all children and many efforts have been implemented in the State to increase engagement of families in the case planning process, information from stakeholder interviews, the Statewide Assessment,

and the onsite case reviews indicates that child and family involvement in case planning remains a challenge for the State (item 25).

- Although the State has a process for TPR, court continuances occur when efforts to locate absent parents, primarily fathers, are not completed in a timely manner. There frequently is not documentation of compelling reasons to support not pursuing TPRs. In some areas of the State, TPR hearings are not being held if the child is not considered “adoptable” (item 28).
- Although the State has a process and policy in place for caseworkers to provide notification of hearings and the opportunity to be heard for foster parents and relative caregivers, notification is not consistent or timely. There is also inconsistency across judicial jurisdictions for foster parents and relative caregivers to be heard during court hearings. Some courts do not allow foster parents in the court, while others are allowed in the court only as observers (item 29).

Quality Assurance System

Performance with regard to the systemic factor of a QA 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 QA system that evaluates the quality and effectiveness of services and measures program strengths and ANIs (item 31).

Arkansas is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of a QA System. The State was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2001 CFSR. The State was not required to evaluate the quality of service delivery in the PIP; however, the State did develop a QA Unit, QA reports, and a supervisory case review system.

Findings from the 2008 CFSR indicate that the State developed and implemented standards to ensure the safety of children in foster care by conducting monthly and quarterly monitoring visits and reviews of foster home files on an annual basis. Additionally, the State conducts comprehensive health assessments on all children entering foster care (item 30).

The State, at the time of the 2008 CFSR, did not have a fully functioning QA case review system, and there was minimal evidence of the use of a case review tool. In practice, their QA system is similar to the Federal CFSR. However, in the year prior to the CFSR, the QA reviews were not being routinely conducted. In addition, it is unclear whether the QA system includes a comprehensive and effective monitoring process, with a clear feedback loop, of foster homes and child care institutions and child-placing agencies (item 31).

Training

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

Arkansas is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. The State was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2001 CFSR.

The CFSR determined that although the State has a training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP and is available to all staff who deliver these services, the onsite CFSR indicated that initial staff training is not easily accessible to all new workers. Delivery of initial staff training is hampered by the fact that caseworkers often begin to carry caseloads before the training is concluded, thus negatively impacting the effectiveness of training and service delivery (item 32). Additionally, the State provides ongoing training and has implemented individual training plans for caseworkers and supervisors; however, case responsibilities, travel distance, and lack of travel funds often prevent staff from receiving ongoing training (item 33). Also, the training provided for prospective and current foster and adoptive parents (item 34) was found not to be in substantial conformity. Although the State does have a training program for pre-service and ongoing training for foster and adoptive parents, the training is not sufficiently addressing and impacting the skills and knowledge needed for the specific and individualized needs of children in foster care.

Service Array

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

Arkansas is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array for the 2008 CFSR. The State was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2001 CFSR.

The general finding of the 2008 CFSR was that, although there are many praiseworthy services available in the State, including the comprehensive health assessment (PACE), and many caseworkers make concerted efforts to access services for the children and families in their caseloads, the array of services is not sufficient to address the needs of children and families served by the system. While the statewide service delivery system is in place, service gaps do exist and were identified in some key service categories, including in the following areas:

- Behavioral/mental health
- Substance abuse treatment
- Sexual abuse victim and offender treatment
- Intensive family services
- Domestic violence services
- Spanish-speaking services
- Placement resources

In addition, many rural areas of the State were identified as not having sufficient services to meet demands, resulting in delayed access to particular services such as dental, medical, behavioral, and mental health services. Also, a lack of transportation reportedly affects service accessibility in some regions of the State (item 36). Finally, despite the resourceful and creative efforts of many agency caseworkers to meet the unique needs of children and families and to individualize services, these efforts were not consistently effective because of the scarcity of key services (item 37).

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 services with services or benefits of other Federal or Federally-assisted programs serving the same population (item 40).

Arkansas is in substantial conformity with the factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. The State also was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2001 CFSR.

The general finding in the 2008 CFSR was that the State includes the input of stakeholders in the development of the APSRs. The State has actively engaged external stakeholders, the courts, CASA, foster parents, advisory boards, and DCFS staff in the development of the State's CFSP. While Arkansas does not have any Federally-recognized Tribes, the State is bordered by States that have large Tribal populations. However, Arkansas has not made efforts to engage or involve any Native American representatives in the development of the CFSP (item 38). The finding in the CFSR was that the State does consistently engage in ongoing consultation with some key stakeholders to obtain their input regarding the goals and objectives of the CFSP (item 39). The CFSR found that there is coordination between DCFS and other Federally-assisted programs to meet the service needs of the children and families served by the agency (item 40).

Stakeholders across the sites commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that DFCS has an advisory board that is involved in all aspects of the title IV-B CFSP, including review of the plan prior to submission. The advisory board is composed of a court representative, a member of the legislature, a CASA representative, a foster parent, and mental health and health care personnel.

Additionally, DCFS has an active Youth Advisory Board, which is made up of youth from the 10 DCFS areas. The board meets quarterly and is facilitated by foster youth, with support and guidance from DCFS staff. The board members review agency policy, identify key issues around practice and service needs, and prepare information for events such as foster parent conferences and trainings for court personnel.

Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

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

Arkansas is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. Arkansas was in substantial conformity with this factor during the 2001 CFSR.

There was evidence that the State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background checks (item 43). The CFSR found that DCFS is diligent in using cross-jurisdictional resources to locate adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children (item 45).

The 2008 CFSR found that the State does not have clear standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that are implemented in a uniform manner (items 42). Concerns also were expressed regarding the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in foster care in the State (item 44). The 2008 CFSR did not find efforts by the State to enhance recruitment that reflects the diversity of children in its foster care system.

Table 1. Arkansas CFSR Ratings for Safety and Permanency Outcomes and Items

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings			Item Ratings	
	In Substantial Conformity?	Percent Substantially Achieved*	Met National Standards?	Rating**	Percent Strength
Safety Outcome 1: Children are first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect	NO	76.9	Met 1 Did not meet 1		
Item 1: Timeliness of investigations				ANI	77
Item 2: Repeat maltreatment				Strength	95
Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate	NO	58.5			
Item 3: Services to prevent removal				ANI	68
Item 4: Risk of harm				ANI	61
Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	NO	41.0	Met 2 Did not meet 2		
Item 5: Foster care reentry				Strength	100
Item 6: Stability of foster care placements				ANI	64
Item 7: Permanency goal for child				ANI	72
Item 8: Reunification, guardianship, and placement with relatives				ANI	72
Item 9: Adoption				ANI	33
Item 10: Other Planned Permanent Living Arrangement				ANI	57
Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved	NO	53.9			
Item 11: Proximity of placement				Strength	96
Item 12: Placement with siblings				ANI	82
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care				ANI	59
Item 14: Preserving connections				ANI	79
Item 15: Relative placement				ANI	67
Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents				ANI	48

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

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

Table 2. Arkansas CFSR Ratings for Child and Family Well-Being Outcomes and Items

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings		Item Ratings	
	In Substantial Conformity?	Percent Substantially Achieved	Rating**	Percent Strength
Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children’s needs	NO	27.7		
Item 17: Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents			ANI	37
Item 18: Child/family involvement in case planning			ANI	31
Item 19: Worker visits with child			ANI	46
Item 20: Worker visits with parents			ANI	33
Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive services to meet their educational needs	NO	71.1		
Item 21: Educational needs of child			ANI	71
Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs	NO	62.3		
Item 22: Physical health of child			ANI	74
Item 23: Mental health of child			ANI	67

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

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

Table 3. Arkansas CFSR Ratings for Systemic Factors and Items

Systemic Factors and Items	In Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
Statewide Information System	Yes	4	
Item 24: The State is operating a statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care			Strength
Care Review System	No	2	
Item 25: Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child’s parents that includes the required provisions			ANI
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
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
Item 28: Provides a process for TPR proceedings in accordance with the provisions of ASFA			ANI
Item 29: Provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child			ANI
Quality Assurance System	No	2	
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 children			Strength
Item 31: The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the 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			ANI
Training	No	2	
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			ANI
Item 33: The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP			ANI

Systemic Factors and Items	In Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
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			ANI
Service Array	No	1	
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			ANI
Item 36: The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP			ANI
Item 37: The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency			ANI
Agency Responsiveness to the Community	Yes	4	
Item 38: In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with Tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP			Strength
Item 39: The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP			Strength
Item 40: The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or Federally assisted programs serving the same population			Strength
Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention	No	2	
Item 41: The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards			Strength
Item 42: The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds			ANI
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

Systemic Factors and Items	In Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
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 adoptive homes are needed			ANI
Item 45: The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children			Strength

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

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

**Final Report
Arkansas Child and Family Services Review
December 2008**

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau**

INTRODUCTION

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Arkansas. 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 (HHS) 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 HHS.

The Arkansas CFSR was conducted the week of January 28, 2008. The period under review was from October 1, 2006, to January 28, 2008. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Arkansas Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS)
- The State Data Profile, prepared by CB, which provides State child welfare data for fiscal year (FY) 2004, FY 2005, and the 12-month CFSR period ending March 31, 2006
- Reviews of 65 cases at 3 sites across the State: 31 cases in the Pulaski County office, 17 cases in the Pope County office, and 17 cases in the St. Francis County office
- 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

Information from each resource is presented for all of the items reviewed.

All 65 cases were open child welfare agency cases at some time during the period under review. The key characteristics of the 65 cases reviewed are presented in the table on page 4.

The first section of the report (Section A: Outcomes) presents the CFSR findings relevant to the State's performance in achieving specified outcomes for children in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. For each outcome, there is a table presenting the data for the case review findings and national indicators (when relevant). The table is followed by a discussion of the State's status with regard to substantial conformity with the outcome at the time of the State's first CFSR review, the State's status relevant to the current review, and a presentation and discussion of each item (indicator) assessed under the outcome. Differences in findings across the sites included in the Onsite Review are described when noteworthy. Variations in outcome and item ratings as a function of type of case (i.e., foster care or in-home services) also are identified when appropriate. The second section of the report (Section B: Systemic

Factors) provides an assessment and discussion of the systemic factors relevant to the child welfare agency's ability to achieve positive outcomes for children.

Key Arkansas Case Characteristics

Case Characteristics	Foster Care Cases N=39*	In-Home Cases N=26
When case was opened/child entered foster care		
Open prior to the period under review	27 (69%)	12 (46%)
Open during the period under review	12 (31%)	14 (54%)
Child entered foster care during the period under review	12 (31%)	**
Child's age at start of period under review		
Younger than age 10	23 (59%)	**
At least 10 but younger than 13	2 (5%)	**
At least 13 but younger than 16	6 (15%)	**
16 and older	8 (21%)	**
Race/Ethnicity		
African-American (Non-Hispanic)	16 (41%)	**
White (Non-Hispanic)	18 (46%)	**
Hispanic (of all races)	2 (5%)	**
Two or more races	3 (8%)	**
Primary reason for opening case		
Neglect (not including medical neglect)	19 (49%)	10 (39%)
Physical abuse	4 (10%)	7 (27%)
Sexual abuse	2 (5%)	2 (8%)
Medical neglect	0	1 (4%)
Substance abuse by parent	4 (10%)	3 (12%)
Domestic violence in child's home	1 (3%)	0
Abandonment	2 (5%)	1 (4%)
Mental/physical health of parent	3 (8%)	0
Child's behavior	1 (3%)	2 (8%)
Other	3 (8%)	0

* Although usually 40 foster care cases are reviewed for each State, only 39 foster care cases were reviewed for the Arkansas 2008 CFSR because in one foster care case, the child had not been in an out-of-home placement during the period under review. Therefore, this case was reviewed as an in-home services case.

**Information on these characteristics for in-home services cases is not provided because all children in the family are considered in these cases.

All 65 cases were open child welfare agency cases at some time during the period under review of October 1, 2006, through January 28, 2008.

SECTION A: OUTCOMES

In the following sections, for each outcome assessed, there is information pertaining to how the State performed on that outcome in the first round. If the outcome was not substantially achieved during the first round of the CFSR, there is a discussion of the key concerns identified at that time and the strategies implemented in the State’s Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address those concerns. This discussion also focuses on whether the key concerns that emerged in the first CFSR continued to be present in the second review, or whether those concerns were resolved, but other concerns emerged.

I. SAFETY

Safety Outcome 1

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved	7	10	3	20	76.9
Partially Achieved	1	3	0	4	15.4
Not Achieved or Addressed	0	0	2	2	7.7
Total Applicable Cases	8	13	5	26	
Not Applicable Cases	9	18	12	39	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Conformity of statewide data indicators with national standards					
	National Standard (%)		State’s Percentage		Meets Standard
Absence of maltreatment recurrence	94.6		95.3		Yes
Absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff	99.68		99.45		No

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Status of Safety Outcome 1

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 76.9 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. This

outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 87.5 percent of Pope County cases, 77 percent of Pulaski County cases, and 60 percent of St. Francis cases. In addition, although Arkansas met the national standard for the measure assessing the absence of maltreatment recurrence, the State did not meet the national standard for the measure assessing absence of maltreatment of children in foster care.

Arkansas was determined to be in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1 during the 2001 CFSR; therefore, the State was not required to address this outcome in its PIP.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

During the 2008 review, item 2 (repeat maltreatment) was rated as a Strength, but item 1 (timeliness of initiating investigations) was rated as an Area Needing Improvement (ANI).

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 X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 26 (40 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable if there were no child maltreatment reports 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 policy requirements.

Arkansas policy states that the Arkansas State Police Crimes Against Children Division (CACD) is responsible for assessing most Priority I allegations of child maltreatment. DCFS assesses Priority II and certain Priority I cases. The assessment for Priority I cases begins immediately, but no later than 24 hours after receipt of the report. Priority II child maltreatment assessments are to begin within 72 hours of the report. The assessment is initiated by interviewing and/or observing the victim child away from the alleged offender. If the caseworker is unable to interview or observe the child, the assessment will be considered initiated after the caseworker has made and documented all reasonable diligence to make contact.

The results of the assessment of this item are presented in the table below.

Item 1	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	7	10	3	20	77
Area Needing Improvement	1	3	2	6	23
Total Applicable Cases	8	13	5	26	
Not Applicable	9	18	12	39	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

This item was rated as a Strength in 87.5 of Pope County cases, 77 percent of Pulaski County cases, and 60 percent of St. Francis County cases.

Item 1 was rated as a Strength when the investigation was initiated and face-to-face contact was established with the children in the family within the timeframes required by State policy or law. Item 1 was rated as an ANI in the six applicable cases when the investigation and/or face-to-face contact were not initiated within the required timeframes. Two cases rated as ANIs included two referrals. In one of these cases, there were two Priority II reports, the other included one Priority I and one Priority II report. In both cases, neither of the investigations was initiated within the required timeframes. The other four cases rated as an ANI involved reports classified as Priority II.

Rating Determination

Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 77 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had initiated an investigation of a maltreatment report in accordance with required timeframes. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for an overall item rating of Strength. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Arkansas implemented the Quality Service Peer Reviews (QSPRs) as part of its PIP after the 2001 CFSR. The QSPR, modeled after the CFSR process, provides qualitative information on the 7 CFSR outcomes and the 23 items incorporated into the outcomes, based on data gathered during onsite case reviews and interviews with caseworkers, parents, foster parents, and children.

A random sample that includes 20 foster care cases and 20 in-home cases is selected each month from one of the 10 DCFS service areas. The PIP required that each area be reviewed annually, except for Pulaski County, which was to be reviewed twice a year due to the size of the county. Additionally, 40 foster care cases and 40 in-home cases are reviewed in Pulaski County.

The first round of QSPRs was conducted in the 10 service areas between August 2004 and August 2005. The agency completed reviews in only seven areas during the second round of QSPRs in 2005 and 2006 and completed QSPRs in only six areas during the third round in 2006 and 2007. According to the Statewide Assessment, DCFS reviewed a total of 1,009 cases from July 2004 through December 2007. Data from the first round of the reviews is referenced in the Statewide Assessment and throughout this report.

According to the Statewide Assessment, data from the State's QSPRs indicate that the timeliness of initiating an investigation was rated as a Strength in 87 percent of the applicable cases. The Statewide Assessment notes that timeliness of initiating investigations also is measured in the State's Annual Report Cards (ARCs). The ARCs data indicate, with the exception of State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2004, that maltreatment investigations are initiated by DCFS in a timely manner about 85 percent of the time. The ARCs also found that investigations are initiated by the CACD in a timely manner in 99 percent of the cases that require this response.

The Statewide Assessment attributes problems with timeliness of investigations to the staff shortage experienced by DCFS, which resulted in increased caseloads for the remaining caseworkers. As reported in the Statewide Assessment, focus group participants who were interviewed in preparation for the Statewide Assessment reported that staff turnover and high caseloads affect the ability of caseworkers to perform their jobs properly.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that investigations are generally initiated in a timely manner. It was reported that there are supervisory monitoring activities regarding compliance with initiation of an investigation, including notations within the Children's Reporting and Information System (CHRIS), which is the State's automated child welfare information system (SACWIS). Stakeholders in Pope County and St. Francis County indicated that DCFS, CACD, and law enforcement have a good working relationship.

In each of the review sites, stakeholders reported having to wait for long periods of time, up to 45 minutes, for the CACD hotline to take their maltreatment report.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 2 was applicable for 22 (34 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable for this item if there was no substantiated or indicated maltreatment report during the period under review. For all applicable cases, reviewers were to determine whether there had been a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report on the family during the period under review, and if so, whether another substantiated or indicated report involving similar circumstances had occurred within a 6-month period before or after that identified report. Information regarding the ratings is provided below.

Item 2	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	6	12	3	21	95
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	1	1	5
Total Applicable Cases	6	12	4	22	
Not Applicable	11	19	13	43	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

This item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of the Pope County and Pulaski County cases and 75 percent of St. Francis County cases.

Item 2 was rated as a Strength when there was no indication of two or more substantiated or indicated maltreatment reports on the family within a 6-month period. Item 2 was rated as an ANI in one case because there were two substantiated maltreatment reports during the period under review that occurred within a 1-month period. Although reports occurring prior to the period under review are not included in the ratings, reviewers found that in 39 of the cases reviewed, there were multiple maltreatment reports on the family during the life of the case. Information regarding the disposition of reports that were received prior to the period under review is not available.

Rating Determination

Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 95 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that there was no recurrence of maltreatment within a 6-month period. In addition, the State met the national standard for the measure assessing the absence of maltreatment recurrence. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, data from the QSPRs indicate that in 95.7 percent of the applicable cases reviewed, there was no recurrence of maltreatment within a 6-month period.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Pulaski County and St. Francis County stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that maltreatment recurrence is not a significant problem in the county. They noted, however, that when there is maltreatment recurrence, it frequently is related to parental substance abuse. St. Francis County stakeholders also reported seeing recurrence in sexual abuse cases involving the same victim but a different perpetrator. Pope County stakeholders did not comment on this item.

Safety Outcome 2

Safety Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percentage
Substantially Achieved	15	16	7	38	58.5
Partially Achieved	1	8	2	11	16.9
Not Achieved or Addressed	1	7	8	16	24.6
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Status of Safety Outcome 2

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 58.5 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 88 percent of Pope County cases, 52 percent of Pulaski County Cases, and 41 percent of St. Francis County cases.

Key Concerns From the 2001 CFSR

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2 in its 2001 CFSR. Both items incorporated in this outcome were rated as ANIs. A key concern identified during the 2001 CFSR was that safety and risk of children and families was not assessed

and addressed in a timely manner, which resulted in children remaining at risk of harm in their homes. Additional concerns identified were risk factors not resolved when case closure occurred; service gaps in some areas of the State, particularly rural counties; and risk identified, but DCFS did not provide sufficient follow-up services or take appropriate actions to reduce or eliminate the risk.

Arkansas developed three major strategies in its PIP to address the findings of the 2001 CFSR. Each strategy included action steps for the individual items that were rated as ANIs. The strategies included:

- Improve case assessments and case planning
- Expand the array of available services
- Develop a full continuum of out-of-home resources

The strategies are discussed under the individual items throughout this report.

Arkansas implemented the following action steps to address concerns of safety and risk:

- Have supervisors monitor to assure that risk assessments are completed through a new supervisory review process
- Strengthen the risk assessment process to assure that risk is identified and addressed throughout the life of the case
- Strengthen the case planning process to keep children safe and prevent removal
- Assure efficient utilization of limited resources in providing needed services to families
- Assure that new staff are aware of available services
- Revise case planning to assure case plans are developed to address ongoing risk and adequately address ongoing aftercare planning
- Assure adequate services are available while child is in foster care and after reunification
- Assure service staff is aware of services and how to access services for children and families

On June 14, 2007, ACF determined that Arkansas successfully completed all renegotiated strategies and targeted goals in the PIP.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

In the 2008 CFSR, both items incorporated in Safety Outcome 2 continued to be rated as ANIs. Similar to the 2001 CFSR, the 2008 CFSR found that some children continue to be unsafe or at risk of harm in their homes because safety and risk were not adequately assessed, services were not provided to address safety issues, or the services provided were insufficient or lacked follow-up to ensure the children's safety.

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 2 are presented below.

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

 Strength **X** Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 3 was applicable in 44 (68 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were excluded from this assessment if the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and there were no other children in the home or if there was no substantiated or indicated maltreatment report or identified risk of harm to the 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 placement of children in foster care while at the same time ensuring their safety. The results of this assessment are shown in the table below.

Item 3	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	9	15	6	30	68
Area Needing Improvement	2	6	6	14	32
Total Applicable Cases	11	21	12	44	
Not Applicable	6	10	5	21	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

There was variation in performance on this item across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 82 percent of Pope County cases, 71 percent of Pulaski County cases, and 50 percent of St. Francis County cases.

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

- Services were provided to the parents and child to prevent removal (13 cases).
- The children were appropriately removed from the home to ensure the child’s safety (14 cases).
- Services were provided after the child was reunified with his/her parents to prevent re-entry (three cases).

Case review information indicates that a broad range of services was offered or provided to families. These included services provided by agency staff and the following additional services: behavior management, parenting skills training, counseling, funds for utilities, substance abuse assessment and treatment, individual therapy, family therapy, homemaker services, education services, child care

services, transportation services, inpatient mental health services, housing services, independent living (IL) services, and psychological evaluations.

Item 3 was rated as an ANI in 14 cases when reviewers determined that services were not provided to ensure the safety of children remaining in-home.

Rating Determination

Item 3 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 68 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to maintain children safely in their own homes. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, 21 percent of DCFS staff who were surveyed for the Statewide Assessment reported that services to meet the needs of the families and children it serves are "rarely" available and "rarely" effective. However, the Statewide Assessment also reports that, according to the QSPR data, protective and preventive services were considered a Strength in 91.7 percent of the applicable cases reviewed.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Many stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DCFS is effective in providing services to prevent placement and is justified when decisions are made to remove children without provision of services. Several stakeholders advised that it is the goal of the agency to remove the offender from the situation when possible. Several Pulaski County stakeholders said that intensive family services (IFS) are used in that county to provide support to families in the in-home services cases. However, stakeholders in that county also noted that funding for IFS is limited.

Stakeholders across the sites reported the following as barriers in efforts to provide services for families to prevent removals:

- DCFS continues to remove children due to issues related to poverty.
- There is a lack of community and State and Federal government resources to assist families financially.
- Caseworkers are not aware of the availability, or lack thereof, of IFS.
- DCFS caseworkers and human service workers, who provide preventive services in the schools, do not generally communicate and coordinate services.
- Due to high turnover, DCFS caseworkers lack experience and knowledge of what actions to take and what services are available to prevent removal.

- Due to minimal tenure in child welfare, caseworkers lack an understanding of maltreatment issues.
- DCFS is reactive and focuses on the incident of abuse as opposed to preventive efforts.

Item 4. Risk of harm to child

 Strength **X** Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 4 was applicable for all 65 cases. The results of this assessment are shown in the table below.

Item 4	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	16	17	7	40	61
Area Needing Improvement	1	14	10	25	39
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

As shown in the table, performance on this item differed across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 94 percent of Pope County cases, 55 percent of Pulaski County cases, and 41 percent of St. Francis County cases. There was significant variation in performance based on the type of case. This item was rated a Strength in 74 percent (29 cases) of the 39 foster care cases and 42 percent (11 cases) of the 26 in-home cases.

Item 4 was rated as a Strength in 40 cases when reviewers determined that the risk of harm to children was appropriately addressed by the agency through (1) conducting initial and ongoing assessments of risk and safety either in the children’s home or in the children’s foster home and (2) addressing all safety-related concerns identified through the assessment.

Item 4 was rated as an ANI in cases when reviewers determined the following:

- There was a lack of adequate initial and ongoing safety and risk assessments during the period under review (21 cases).
 - Four cases lacked initial safety and risk assessments.
 - Eleven cases lacked ongoing safety and risk assessments.
 - Six cases lacked both initial and ongoing assessments.
- There was risk of harm in the foster care setting, and safety and risk were not assessed (two cases).
- Risk was not assessed prior to or following reunification (two cases).

Rating Determination

Item 4 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that the agency had appropriately addressed the risk of harm to the children in 61 percent of the cases. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for an overall rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCFS policy requires that a health and safety assessment be completed in conjunction with the child maltreatment assessment in all child maltreatment cases. The health and safety assessment is designed to identify factors in the home that affect the child's immediate safety and to guide the caseworker in making removal decisions. The assessment tool also is used to assess the child's health and safety at placement changes. DCFS also requires a risk assessment, which identifies if the child is at risk of maltreatment, indicates the level of involvement needed to ensure the child's well-being, and determines if a case should remain open for services. The initial risk assessment serves as the baseline risk for the case's family strengths, needs, and risk assessment.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, QSPR data indicate that in 94.9 percent of applicable cases reviewed, reviewers determined that there was evidence of agency effectiveness in reducing the risk of harm to children. Data from the ARCs indicate in SFY 2007, 97.78 percent of foster homes were without maltreatment reports.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Pope County stakeholders expressed the opinion that the agency is effective in assessing safety and risk. However, Pulaski County stakeholders expressed the opinion that the effectiveness of safety and risk assessments varies by caseworkers. St. Francis County stakeholders did not comment on this item.

Stakeholders at the three review sites and at the State level reported additional challenges to assessing risk of harm to children, including:

- Assessment of safety and risk of harm is based on formal risk assessment tools completed in CHRIS, as opposed to ongoing and continuous informal assessments.
- Due to turnover, caseworkers lack the skills and experience to assess underlying causes of maltreatment related to family dynamics, caregiver capability, child vulnerability, and environmental factors.
- Practice is incident-based and focuses on the victim, not on the entire family.
- Monitoring safety and risk in foster home placements is deficient.
- CACD staff and DCFS do not participate in joint training.

II. PERMANENCY

Permanency Outcome 1

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved	4	9	3	16	41.0
Partially Achieved	5	10	6	21	53.9
Not Achieved or Addressed	1	0	1	2	5.1
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	0	0	0	0	
Conformity of statewide data indicators with national standards					
	National Standard (Scaled Score)		State's Composite Score		Meets Standard (Yes/No)
Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification	122.6 +		145.1		Yes
Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions	106.4 +		97.8		No
Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods	121.7 +		130.7		Yes
Composite 4: Placement stability	101.5 +		68.0		No

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Status of Permanency Outcome 1

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

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 41.0 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.
- The State Data Profile indicates that for the CFSR 12-month target period, the State did not meet the national standards for Permanency Composite 2 (timeliness of adoptions) and Permanency Composite 4 (placement stability).

However, the State did meet the national standard for Permanency Composite 1 (timeliness and permanency of reunification) and for Permanency Composite 3 (permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods). Performance on the individual measures included in the composites is presented in the discussion of the items related to each measure.

The outcome was substantially achieved in 47 percent of Pulaski County cases, 30 percent of St. Francis County cases, and 40 percent of Pope County cases.

Key Concerns From the 2001 CFSR

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1 in its 2001 CFSR. Item 10 pertaining to the permanency goal of Other Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (OPPLA) was rated as a Strength. All other items incorporated in the outcome were rated as ANIs. The key concerns identified in the 2001 CFSR were as follow:

- Case reviews indicated that caseworkers had difficulty with the concurrent planning concept for families and, as a result, issues regarding adoption were not addressed until after termination of parental rights (TPR) had occurred.
- Formal assessments and services were insufficient to ensure appropriate placement matches between foster homes and children in need of placement.
- Foster parents believed there was a lack of ongoing partnership and communication with DCFS, which appeared to impact placement stability.
- Placement options to meet the children's individual needs were hampering timely achievement of permanency goals.
- Noncustodial fathers were often not involved in permanency planning.
- Services to support adoption for older children were insufficient.
- IL assessments and services for teens were inconsistently delivered across the State.
- IL skills for youth were not adequately assessed, youth were not involved in development of services, and foster parents were not aware of the availability of IL services.
- Lack of coordination between DCFS and courts prevented appropriate and timely changes to permanency goals.

Arkansas implemented the following action steps in the PIP to address the concerns of timeliness of adoption, stability of placement, appropriate services for older youth, and guardianship:

- Increase the number of foster parents by 10 percent who will accept children and meet their special needs
- Expand support groups and specialized training for foster parents
- Develop an exit interview process to determine the reasons foster parents stop fostering and implement a corrective action plan to address the reasons

- Increase uniformity of adoption services statewide by centralizing adoption field staff in order to allow adoption specialists and supervisors, to focus on case planning for children with a goal of adoption
- Train multidisciplinary teams on concurrent planning to assure uniform practice
- Revise the case planning process to assure family members are involved and to include noncustodial parents
- Develop and implement case plans to move children to permanency
- Ensure relatives are appropriately explored as placement options

Arkansas met the target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP period.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

In the 2008 CFSR, item 5 (foster care re-entries) was rated as a Strength. All other items included in this outcome were rated as ANIs. The key findings of the 2008 CFSR are as follows:

- The Onsite Review indicates that there are issues in maintaining stable placements for foster children, particularly as it relates to meeting their mental and behavioral health needs and ensuring that their placements are safe and well-supported. Additionally, placement changes generally were due to placements of children in foster homes that were not adequately matched to meet their needs (item 6).
- Arkansas continues to experience inconsistencies with regard to the establishment of timely and appropriate permanency goals for children in foster care. Furthermore, the State continues to be inconsistent in meeting Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requirements and filing for TPR in a timely manner (item 7).
- Information from the Onsite Review indicates that DCFS did not make diligent efforts to reunify children with parents or relatives (item 8).
- Information from the Onsite Review indicates that the State is not consistently completing adoptions in a timely manner (item 9).
- The State is not consistently assisting youth in achieving the goal of OPPLA (item 10).

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

Item 5. Foster care re-entries

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 5 was applicable for 12 (31 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if the child did not enter 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. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 5	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	3	6	3	12	100
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	0	0	0
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	3	6	3	12	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	13	7	27	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

This item was rated a Strength in 100 percent of the applicable cases.

State performance on the individual measure of foster care re-entry (measure C1.4) included in Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification was as follows: 13.3 percent of the children exiting foster care to reunification in the 12 months prior to the CFSR 12-month target period re-entered foster care in less than 12 months from the time of discharge. This percentage is less than the median of 15.0 percent. However, it exceeds the national 25th percentile for this measure of 9.9 percent. For this measure, lower percentages are associated with higher levels of performance.

Item 5 was rated as a Strength in 11 of the applicable foster care cases because the child's entry into foster care during the period under review did not take place within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode. One case was rated as a Strength because, although the child re-entered foster care in 3 months, DCFS made concerted efforts to prevent the re-entry of the child into foster care by providing services to the family after the child was discharged to the home of a relative.

Rating Determination

Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of the applicable cases reviewed, which exceeds the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item was rated as an ANI in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, data from the QSPR indicate that 95.9 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for the item addressing re-entry into foster care.

The Statewide Assessment reports that focus group participants suggested that foster care re-entries may occur in the following situations:

- When families do not have an adequate support system to monitor the reunification
- When post-reunification services are nonexistent or prematurely discontinued
- When individualized services to meet the families' unique needs are not available
- When a parent experiences a substance abuse relapse

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders in Pulaski County commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that re-entries into foster care occur when DCFS has had minimal involvement with the family after reunification and when services to meet the individual needs of the family after reunification have not been provided. Pope County and St. Francis County stakeholders did not comment on this item.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

All 39 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. Reviewers also assessed the stability of the child's current placement setting. The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 6	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	8	13	4	25	64
Area Needing Improvement	2	6	6	14	36
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	0	0	0	0	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Performance on this item varied across sites. Cases were rated as a Strength in 80 percent of Pope County cases, 68 percent of Pulaski County cases, and 40 percent of St. Francis County cases.

Arkansas's performance on the individual measures of placement stability included in Composite 4: Placement stability is reported below:

- 69.2 percent of the children in foster care for at least 8 days but less than 12 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is less than the national median for this measure of 83.3 percent.
- 40.1 percent of the children in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is less than the national median for this measure of 59.9 percent.
- 17.4 percent of the children in foster care for at least 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is less than the national median for this measure of 33.9 percent.

These data indicate that placement stability for children in foster care is a considerable challenge for the State. Performance on all three measures was in the bottom 25 percent of States nationally.

Item 6 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The child did not experience a placement change during the period under review, and either the current placement was stable or the child was discharged from foster care during the period under review (22 cases).
- The placement changes experienced were in the child's best interests and were intended to further achieve the child's permanency goal or to provide specialized services to the child (three cases). For example, a placement change was made in one case to place the child in the care of a relative and in another case to reunite a teen mother with her child.

Item 6 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined one of the following:

- The child was in multiple placement settings during the period under review, and at least one placement change was not planned by the agency to further attain the child's permanency goal (13 cases). Placement changes generally were due to placements of children in foster homes that were not adequately matched to meet their needs. In most of these cases, placements disrupted at the request of the foster parent or relative caregiver because they did not believe that they could meet the needs of the child or adequately handle the child's behaviors.
- The child's placement setting, at the time of the onsite CFSR, was not stable (one case).

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- Children in 22 cases experienced only one placement during the period under review.

- Children in five cases experienced two placements during the period under review.
- Children in 12 cases experienced 3 or more placements during the period under review, including 1 case with 9 placements and 2 cases with 10 placements.

Rating Determination

Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 64 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that children experienced placement stability or that changes in placements were in the best interest of the child. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. Item 6 also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, data from the QSPR indicate that placement stability was rated as a Strength in 85 percent of the applicable cases. Data from the ARCs indicate that in SFY 2003, 73.9 percent of children in foster care for less than 12 months had two or fewer placements. This percentage increased to 80.3 percent in SFY 2005, but then declined to 68.4 percent in SFY 2007. The Statewide Assessment did not provide a reason for the decline.

DCFS staff attending Statewide Assessment focus sessions reported that locating placements for children is a “daily struggle” and, as a result, they often “just find a place that will take the child for the night.” The following opinions also were shared by focus group attendees:

- More placement resources are needed across the State.
- Placements are needed that will “stick with” the children and not have them moved for “minimal reasons.”
- Therapeutic foster homes are not providing therapeutic services.
- Certain placement providers are contracted to serve children with “mental and behavioral needs,” yet they request that children be moved for exhibiting those needs.
- Providers need to be closely monitored to ensure they are providing the contracted services.
- Supportive services are needed for foster parents.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of the stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DCFS is not providing placement stability for children in foster care, especially older children and children with behavioral problems. Stakeholders noted that placements of children often disrupt because the placement is based on the availability of a bed rather than on the skills and training of foster parents.

Several stakeholders noted that placement changes generally are initiated by the placement providers. Stakeholders commented that DCFS does not monitor or provide support services to the placement providers to prevent placement disruptions.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

 Strength **X** Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

All 39 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 7. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had established a permanency goal for the child in a timely manner and whether the most current permanency goal was appropriate. The results of this assessment are shown below.

Item 7	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	7	15	6	28	72
Area Needing Improvement	3	4	4	11	28
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	0	0	0	0	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 79 percent of Pulaski County cases, 70 percent of Pope County cases, and 60 percent of St. Francis County cases.

Arkansas met the national standard for Permanency Composite 3: Achieving permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods. Performance on the individual measures included in this composite was as follows:

- 25.7 percent of the children in foster care for 24 months or longer at the start of the 12-month CFSR target period were discharged from foster care to a permanent home (i.e., adoption, reunification with parents or other relatives, or guardianship) by the end of the target period. This percentage is about equal to the national median for this measure of 25.0 percent.
- 97.4 percent of the children exiting foster care during the CFSR 12-month target period who were legally free for adoption at the time of exit were discharged to a permanent home. This percentage exceeds the national median for this measure of 96.8 percent.
- 38.5 percent of the children who were discharged from foster care during the 12-month target period with a discharge reason of emancipation had been in foster care for 3 years or longer at the time of discharge. This percentage is lower than the national median of 47.8 percent. For this measure, lower scores indicate more positive performance.

These data indicate that Arkansas's performance was at or above 50 percent of the States nationally on all measures.

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 ANI in 11 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The child's current permanency goal was not appropriate given the case situation and the needs of the child (two cases).
- The child's permanency goal was not established in a timely manner (seven cases).
- A TPR petition was not filed in accordance with ASFA guidelines and no compelling reasons were documented (six cases).

Case review findings pertaining to case plan goals were as follows:

- Seven children had a single goal of OPPLA.
- Fourteen children had a single goal of adoption.
- Seven children had a single goal of reunification (including living with other relatives).
- One child had a goal of guardianship.
- Seven children had concurrent goals of reunification and adoption.
- Three children had concurrent goals of reunification with parents and reunification with relatives.

Case review findings pertaining to TPR were as follows:

- At the time of the Onsite Review, 22 of the 39 children in the foster care cases had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months.
- TPR had been filed in a timely manner in 13 of the 22 cases applicable for TPR.
- Compelling reasons for not filing were noted in two of the nine cases in which TPR had not been filed timely.

Rating Determination

Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 72 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, the QSPR findings indicate that establishing permanency goals in a timely manner was rated as a Strength in 84 percent of the applicable cases reviewed.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DCFS establishes initial permanency goals in a timely manner. However, according to some stakeholders, subsequent goals are not explored thoroughly.

Stakeholders expressed different opinions about the practice of concurrent planning. State-level and Pulaski County stakeholders noted that concurrent goals are not always established and when they are established, caseworkers do not work toward both goals simultaneously. Instead, they wait until one goal is ruled out before pursuing the other goal. However, Pope County stakeholders reported that concurrent goals generally are established for children and that caseworkers focus on both goals simultaneously. Most stakeholders, however, suggested that there is a need for more education of staff regarding concurrent planning. Stakeholders reported that permanency goals change depending on the situation as opposed to the child’s individual needs. For example, the permanency goal of reunification is not changed to adoption until TPR has been achieved.

Item 8. Reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 8 was applicable for 18 (46 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had achieved the permanency goals of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner or, if the goals had not been achieved, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was in the process of making, diligent efforts to achieve the goals. The results of this assessment are shown in the table below.

Item 8	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	3	5	5	13	72
Area Needing Improvement	2	3	0	5	28
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	5	8	5	18	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	5	11	5	21	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of the St. Francis County cases, 62.5 percent of Pulaski County cases, and 60 percent of Pope County cases.

Arkansas met the national standard for Permanency Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification. Performance on the individual measures included in this composite in the 12-month CFSR target period was as follows:

- 85.5 percent of the reunifications occurred in less than 12 months of the child’s entry into foster care. This percentage exceeds the national 75th percentile for this measure of 75.2 percent.
- The median length of stay in foster care for children discharged to reunification was 2.3 months. This length of stay is less than the 25th percentile for this measure of 5.4 months. A lower number of months indicates higher performance.
- 66.3 percent of children entering foster care in the last 6 months prior to the 12-month target period were discharged from foster care to reunification in less than 12 months of entry into foster care. This percentage exceeds the 75th percentile for this measure of 48.4 percent.

These data indicate that Arkansas performed in the top 25 percent of States nationally with regard to the timeliness of reunification measures. Arkansas’s performance on the fourth measure included in this composite pertaining to re-entry into foster care is discussed under item 5.

Item 8 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the goal had been achieved in a timely manner or that the agency was making concerted efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner (13 cases). Item 8 was rated as an ANI in five cases when reviewers determined that the agency had not made diligent efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner. There were no consistent trends in these cases regarding reasons for delays in achieving this goal in a timely manner.

Rating Determination

Item 8 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 72 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification, permanent placement with relatives, or guardianship in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, data from the QSPR indicate that in 75 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the State was effective in “discharging” foster children to reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders across the sites commenting about reunification during the onsite CFSR indicated that the goal of reunification is generally the initial goal set by the court. Frequently, reunification may no longer be an appropriate goal, and concerted efforts are not being made to reunify the family, but the goal remains reunification until TPR is achieved. It also was reported that reunification and

placement with relatives are often delayed due to DCFS’s lack of diligent search for relatives and absent parents, particularly fathers. The lack of available services, such as substance abuse treatment, sometimes hindered timely reunification. Stakeholders in St. Francis County expressed the opinion that reunification often occurs before the family is ready to reunify.

Item 9. Adoption

 Strength **X** Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 9 was applicable for 21 (54 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. 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 are shown in the table below.

Item 9	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	1	6	0	7	33
Area Needing Improvement	5	6	3	14	67
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	6	12	3	21	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	4	7	7	18	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Performance varied across the sites. This item was rated as a Strength in 50 percent of Pulaski County cases, 16 percent of Pope County cases, and 0 percent of St. Francis County cases. However, because of the variation in sample sizes and the small samples in two of the sites, comparisons in performance are not meaningful.

Arkansas did not meet the national standard for Permanency Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions. Performance during the 12-month CFSR target period on the individual measures included in this composite was as follows:

- 34.5 percent of the children exiting to adoption were discharged in less than 24 months from the time of entry into foster care. This percentage exceeds the national median of 26.8 percent for this measure, but is less than the 75th percentile of 36.6 percent.
- The median length of stay in foster care for children adopted was 31.5 months. This length of stay is less than the national median of 32.4 months but more than the 25th percentile of 27.3 months. A lower number of months indicates a higher level of performance.

- 24.1 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the CFSR 12-month target period were discharged to a final adoption by the last day of the target period. This percentage exceeds the 75th percentile for this measure of 22.7 percent for this measure.
- 5.2 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the CFSR 12-month target period became legally free for adoption (i.e., there was a TPR for both mother and father) within 6 months. This percentage is less than the national median for this measure of 8.8 percent.
- 44.5 percent of children who were legally free for adoption were adopted within 12 months of becoming legally free. This percentage is less than the national median for this measure of 45.8 percent.

These data suggest that, in comparison to other States, Arkansas is effective in achieving adoptions in a timely manner when the measure focuses on a cohort of children exiting foster care to adoption. The data also indicate that the State is highly effective in achieving adoption for children in foster care for long periods of time. However, the State was less effective in achieving TPRs for children who have been in foster care for long periods of time and for achieving finalized adoptions in a timely manner for children who are legally free for adoption.

Item 9 was rated as a Strength in seven cases when reviewers determined that the State had made diligent efforts to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. Item 9 was rated as an ANI in 14 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The adoption was delayed because of frequent continuances granted by the courts or delays in scheduling TPR hearings (two cases).
- There were delays in the adoption process because DCFS did not file for TPR in a timely manner (five cases).
- The agency had not made a diligent effort to find an adoptive home for the child (four cases).
- The adoption was delayed because of problems with the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) process (one case).
- The adoption was delayed because DCFS had not completed the necessary paperwork (two cases). In one case, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) fingerprint results were delayed for several months.
- Adoption was the concurrent plan, but it was not pursued until the agency was ordered by the court to pursue that goal (one case).
- The child's nationality was unknown, and there was a delay of 18 months for the child to obtain permanent resident papers (one case)

Additional findings relevant to this item were the following:

- Adoption was finalized during the period under review in 3 of the 21 applicable cases. In two cases, the adoption was finalized in less than 24 months from the child's entry into foster care. In the other case, the adoption was finalized in 50 months.

- Of the 18 children who remained in foster care, 4 children had been in foster care less than 1 year, 3 children had been in foster care less than 2 years, 5 children had been in foster care for more than 2 years, and 6 children had been in foster care for more than 3 years. None of these children were placed in a pre-adoptive home.

Rating Determination

Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 33 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to Statewide Assessment, data from the QSPRs indicate that timeliness of adoptions was rated as a Strength in 56 percent of the applicable cases. The Statewide Assessment suggests that the low performance in this area may be attributed at least in part to staffing problems with DCFS adoption specialists. The Statewide Assessment notes that in SFY 2004 and part of SFY 2005 the Adoptions Unit vacancy rate was at 35 percent.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that when attorneys *ad litem* were interviewed they suggested that DCFS has not been competitive in its recruitment of adoptive families and has been unrealistic in its policy regarding qualifications for adoption. The attorneys *ad litem* reported that there is insufficient adoption staff to complete the work and that adoption staff are not properly trained or supervised.

In preparation for the Statewide Assessment, attorneys from the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Chief Counsel (OCC) shared the opinion that DCFS adoption staff does not feel a sense of urgency to finalize adoptions and is not committed to moving the child to finalization even though the children have been in placement for a period of time. It also was reported in focus sessions that (1) calls from families are not being returned by caseworkers and (2) families want to adopt and the children are placed in their homes, but the caseworkers are not proceeding to finalization.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that OCC staff expressed the opinion that the courts and DCFS staff in some areas do not want to move towards TPR.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders at the three review sites and the State level commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DCFS is not aggressively moving cases to adoption. Several stakeholders suggested that a particular area of concern is the length of time between a child becoming legally free for adoption (i.e. having a TPR for both parents) and the finalization of an adoption.

Although most stakeholders noted that adoptions occur more quickly for younger children than for older children, a few stakeholders noted that there has been an increase in adoptions of older children in recent years.

Various stakeholders across the State identified the following barriers to achieving adoptions in a timely manner:

- There are insufficient and inconsistent efforts across the State to recruit adoptive parents.
- Documents required for the adoption process are frequently not collected until TPR has occurred.
- Locating homes for children with behavioral, mental health, or medical issues is difficult.
- The agency does not actively search for absent parents, particularly fathers, until the case approaches termination.
- There is a shortage of adoption staff.

Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

 Strength **X** Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 10 was applicable for 7 (18 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine if the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to assist children in attaining the goal related to OPPLA. The results are presented in the table below.

Item 10	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	1	2	1	4	57
Area Needing Improvement	1	1	1	3	43
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	3	2	7	
Not Applicable Foster Care Case	8	16	8	32	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Item 10 was rated as a Strength in four cases when reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to ensure a long-term placement for the child and to provide the necessary services to prepare the child for IL. The item was rated as an ANI in three cases when reviewers determined the following:

- The agency was not providing the child with sufficient services to assist in transitioning to IL (two cases).
- The child was not in a long-term placement and the current placement is unstable (one case)

Rating Determination

Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 57 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the goal of OPPLA was being addressed in an appropriate way. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. The item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, QSPR data indicate that securing the goal of OPPLA for children was rated as a Strength in 86.4 percent of the applicable cases. In addition, the QSPR measures the effectiveness of the DCFS IL program for children who are getting close to majority as a Strength in around 84.6 percent of the applicable cases.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders at the State level commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that other permanency options are not thoroughly explored prior to choosing OPPLA. Pulaski County stakeholders reported that the judge will set the concurrent goal of OPPLA at the age of 14.

The opinions about the State's IL program differed among stakeholders. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that the IL program is very strong and prepares youth for transitioning from foster care to IL.

However, other stakeholders across the State voiced concern that the current IL program is ineffective and inconsistent. These stakeholders suggested that the youth do not receive enough training or individualized services to ensure a successful transition to living independently. These stakeholders also said that not all youth over the age of 14 are referred to the program because it is left up to the caseworker to make the decision about the referral. Stakeholders reported that frequently, it is the youth with behavioral problems who are not referred.

Stakeholders at the three review sites and the State level were not clear about the college services that can be funded by DCFS. There appeared to be much confusion by stakeholders about what college services DCFS will pay, which reportedly also frustrates the youth served by the IL program.

Permanency Outcome 2

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percentage
Substantially Achieved	5	10	6	21	53.9
Partially Achieved	5	9	3	17	43.6
Not Achieved	0	0	1	1	2.6
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	0	0	0	0	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Status of Permanency Outcome 2

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 53.9 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome did not vary significantly across sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 60 percent of St. Francis County cases, 53 percent of Pulaski County cases, and 50 percent of Pope County cases.

Key Concerns From the 2001 CFSR

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2 in its 2001 CFSR. All items incorporated in this outcome were rated as ANIs except for the items pertaining to placing children in close proximity to their families (item 11) and maintaining relationships between parents and children in foster care (item 16). The key concerns identified in the 2001 CFSR were as follow:

- The limited number of foster homes made it difficult to place sibling groups together.
- When siblings were not placed together, there was a lack of effort to reunite or to provide visitation between siblings.
- Visitation with parents and children did not occur due to DCFS's inability to provide the necessary supervision.
- There was inconsistency in following policy and procedure for maintaining contact between children in foster care and their extended relatives after TPR had occurred.

- DCFS did not consistently seek out or involve absent fathers of children who came into foster care.
- DCFS did not generally pursue relative placements of children who came into foster care.
- Relative placements occurred, but DCFS was often not consistent in providing services or support to relatives providing care.

Arkansas implemented the following action steps intended to address concerns of placement with siblings, preserving connections, visits with parents and siblings in foster care, and relative placement:

- Strengthen the family assessment process to assure that quality placement and visitation decisions occur
- Increase the number of foster parents who will accept sibling groups by 10 percent
- Explore relative placements for individual children and sibling groups
- Expand policy and training to address post-TPR visitation between siblings
- Centralize the adoption function to increase the consistency of post-adoption sibling visitation
- Implement and monitor the statewide adoption recruitment plan to increase placement options for children

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

In the 2008 CFSR, item 11 (proximity of placements) was rated as a Strength. All other items included in this outcome were rated as ANIs. The key findings of the 2008 CFSR are as follows:

- DCFS continues not to be consistent in its efforts to place siblings together (item 12).
- Visitation with mothers, fathers, and siblings was not of sufficient quality or quantity to meet the needs of the families (item 13).
- There was a lack of consistency with regard to supporting children’s connections with extended family, siblings, school, and community connections (item 14).
- There continues to be inconsistent efforts made to search for maternal and paternal relatives as placement resources for children (item 15).
- The support of the parent’s relationship with their children while the children were in foster care continues to be inconsistent, and less attention was given to promoting children’s bonds with fathers than with mothers (item 16).

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 2 are presented and discussed below.

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 11 was applicable for 28 (72 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. Cases determined to be not applicable were those in which TPR had been attained prior to the period under review, contact with the child’s parents was not considered to be in the child’s best interests, and/or the child’s parents were deceased or their whereabouts were unknown. In assessing item 11, reviewers were to determine whether the child’s most current foster care setting was in close proximity to the child’s parents or close relatives. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 11	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	7	15	5	27	96
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	1	1	4
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	15	6	28	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	3	4	4	11	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

This item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of the Pope County and Pulaski County cases and in 83 percent of St. Francis County cases. Item 11 was rated as a Strength in 27 cases when reviewers determined that the child was placed in the same community or county as the parents or that the child’s placement was not in the same community or county, but was still in close proximity to the parents. The item also was rated as a Strength if the child was placed out of his or her community or county, but that the placement was necessary to meet the needs of the child and/or support attainment of the permanency goal.

In the one case rated as an ANI, the mother lived in a neighboring State and the child was placed several hours away. Reviewers determined that the agency should have placed the child in a county closer to the mother.

Rating Determination

Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 96 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DCFS 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 that were necessary to meet special needs. This percentage exceeds the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the QSPR data indicate that children were placed in close proximity to their parents in 94 percent of the applicable cases reviewed.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders in Pulaski County and Pope County commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that although DCFS caseworkers attempt to place children in close proximity to their families, a lack of sufficient placement resources often limits their ability to do so. Stakeholders in St. Francis County and at the State level did not comment on this item.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 12 was applicable for 22 (56 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if the child did not have a sibling in foster care at any time during the period under review. 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. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 12	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	3	11	4	18	82
Area Needing Improvement	1	3	0	4	18
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	4	14	4	22	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	6	5	6	17	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was determined to be substantially achieved in 100 percent of St. Francis County cases, 79 percent of Pulaski County cases, and 75 percent of Pope County cases.

Item 12 was rated as a Strength in 18 cases when reviewers determined that the child was placed with siblings, or that the child was not placed with siblings but that the separation was in the best interests of the child or was necessary because the child or one of the siblings had special placement needs.

Item 12 was rated as an ANI in four cases when reviewers determined DCFS had not made sufficient efforts to locate a placement for a sibling group when it was appropriate for the group to be placed together.

Rating Determination

Item 12 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 82 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency placed siblings together in foster care whenever possible and appropriate. This is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCFS policy requires that siblings live together in the same foster home when it is in the best interests of each child. QSPR reviewers rated this area as a Strength in 92 percent of the applicable cases. Data contained in the ARCs indicate that children were placed with at least one sibling in 66.4 percent of the cases in SFY 2003. This percentage increased to 70.5 percent in SFY 2006. The percentage of cases in which all members of a sibling group were placed together was 35.4 percent in SFY 2006.

The Statewide Assessment reports that it is difficult to locate placements that are able to accommodate large sibling groups. Often siblings are separated initially while caseworkers attempt to locate homes to accommodate all of the siblings.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders across the sites and at the State level commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that diligent efforts are made to place siblings together but that there are a limited number of placement resources that are willing and/or able to take siblings groups.

Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 13 was applicable for 27 (69 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable for an assessment of this item if the child had no siblings in foster care and if one of the following conditions was met with regard to the parents:

- TPR was established prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved in the child’s life (or parents were deceased).
- Visitation with a parent was considered to not be in the best interests of the child.

In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine 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 whether these visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of children and families. The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 13	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	2	11	3	16	59
Area Needing Improvement	4	5	2	11	41
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	6	16	5	27	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	4	3	5	12	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 69 percent of Pulaski County cases, 60 percent of St. Francis County cases, and 33 percent of Pope County cases.

Item 13 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visitation with parents and siblings met the needs of the children. Item 13 was rated as an ANI in 10 cases when reviewers determined the agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with mothers, siblings, and/or especially fathers. In one case rated as an ANI, the reviewers found that although the frequency of visits with the parents was sufficient, the quality of the visitation did not meet the needs of the family. That is, the typical hour-long visitation between the child and parents did not increase as the family moved towards reunification nor was the family allowed to visit in a location outside of the DCFS office.

Specific findings with regard to the frequency of visitation with mothers, fathers, and siblings are provided in the table below. Visits with mothers occurred at least once a month in 91 percent of the cases, visits with fathers occurred at least once a month in 47 percent

of the cases, and visits with siblings occurred in 92 percent of the cases. Visits were far more likely to occur with mothers and siblings than with fathers.

Visitation Frequency for Children in Foster Care (during the period under review)	Mother (Number of cases)	Father (Number of cases)	Siblings in Foster Care (Number of Cases)
Visits occurred at least weekly	16	6	6
Visits occurred less than weekly, but at least twice a month	3	1	5
Visits occurred less than twice a month, but at least once a month	2	1	1
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	2	5	0
Visits did not occur	0	4	1
Total cases for which item 13 was applicable	23	17	13

Rating Determination

Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 59 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency made concerted efforts to ensure that visitation was of sufficient frequency to meet the needs of the family. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCFS policy requires that families and children have reasonable opportunities for visits, communication by telephone, and involvement in life activities. The policy also states that “The preferred location of the visits is the parents’ home, or if that is not possible, in the most homelike setting possible. Office visits are a last resort.” Data from the QSPR rated visitation with parents and siblings as a Strength in 77.4 percent of the applicable cases.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders across the sites commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DCFS tries to meet the minimum standards for parental visitation. However, they also noted that most visitations occur in the local office during office hours, which was reported to be restrictive. As a result, in order to see each other, children must miss school, and parents must miss work.

Stakeholders at all sites voiced concern about the inconsistencies in practice with regard to youth visits with siblings. Pope County stakeholders report that sibling visits occur every other week, while Pulaski County stakeholders report that the frequency of sibling visits depends on the caseworker assigned to the case.

Item 14. Preserving connections

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 14 was applicable for all of the 39 foster care cases. 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, extended family, faith, and friends while the child was in foster care. This item is not rated on the basis of visits or contacts with parents or siblings in foster care. The results of the assessment are provided in the table below.

Item 14	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	7	16	8	31	79
Area Needing Improvement	3	3	2	8	21
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	0	0	0	0	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Performance on this item varied slightly across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 84 percent of Pulaski County cases, 80 percent of St. Francis County cases, and 70 percent of Pope County cases.

Item 14 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with extended family members (e.g., through phone contact, visits, and placements with relatives) (19 cases).
- The agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with the child’s religious or cultural heritage (seven cases).
- The agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with the school, community, and important activities such as dance class or sports (e.g., selecting placements that do not require a change of school, jobs, or sports teams) (17 cases).

Item 14 was rated as an ANI in eight cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to maintain the child’s connections to extended family (six cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections to school or community (two cases).
- The agency did not explore any connections for the child (one case).

In one case, there was no evidence that an inquiry was ever made with the family about whether the child had Native American ancestry to determine whether the provisions of the Indian Child Welfare Act apply.

Rating Determination

Item 14 was rated as an ANI. In 79 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to maintain the child’s connections with extended family, culture, religion, community, and school. This is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in Arkansas’s 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, QSPR data indicate that preserving connections was rated as a Strength in 87.5 percent of the applicable cases.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Pulaski County stakeholders reported that DCFS makes every effort to maintain children in their schools. Caseworkers will transport children to their schools, if necessary. It was reported by stakeholders that Arkansas law requires schools to provide transportation for foster children so their education will not be disrupted. However, according to stakeholders, this rarely occurs. Pope County and St. Francis County stakeholders did not comment on this item.

Item 15. Relative placement

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 15 was applicable for 33 (85 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if relative placement was not an option during the period under review because (1) the child was in an adoptive placement at the start of the time period or (2) the child entered foster care needing specialized services that could not be provided in a relative placement. 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 are presented in the table below.

Item 15	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	6	10	6	22	67
Area Needing Improvement	1	8	2	11	33
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	18	8	33	
Not Applicable Foster Care Case	3	1	2	6	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Performance on this measure varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 86 percent of Pope County cases, 75 percent of St. Francis County cases, and 56 percent of Pulaski County cases.

Item 15 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The child was placed with relatives or close family members (12 cases).
- The child was not placed with relatives, but the agency made diligent efforts to search for both maternal and paternal relatives when applicable (10 cases). In these cases, children were not placed with relatives because a relative could not be found or because identified relatives were unable or unwilling to care for the children and/or had a criminal record or history of substantiated child maltreatment.

Item 15 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- The agency had not made diligent efforts to search for known maternal and paternal relatives during the period under review (seven cases).
- The agency made diligent efforts to search for maternal relatives, but not paternal relatives (three cases).
- The agency located relatives, but did not make efforts to place the children with them (one case).

Rating Determination

Item 15 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 67 percent of cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, QSPR data indicate that relative placements were rated as a Strength in 79.7 percent of the applicable cases. The Statewide Assessment also reports that ARC data indicate that in SFY 2007, 3.5 percent of children in foster

care were placed with relatives. Data from the ARC indicate that in SFY 2003, 29 percent of children exiting care exited to relative custody and by SFY 2007, 43 percent exited to relative custody.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DCFS makes concerted efforts to seek relatives as potential placement resources. However, some Pulaski County stakeholders indicated that relatives are not screened thoroughly enough when they are identified.

Pope County and Pulaski County stakeholders reported the use of provisional licensing for relatives, which allows relatives to be a placement resource for a child without completing training or an FBI check. The relative must complete training and the FBI checks within 6 months of the child’s placement in order to maintain the placement. According to stakeholders, financial payment cannot be made to the family until they are fully licensed. Pope County stakeholders reported an increase in relative placements due to provisional licensing.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 16 was applicable for 27 (69 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved with the child, a relationship with the parents was considered to be not in the child’s best interests throughout the period under review, or both parents were deceased. 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 fathers through efforts other than arranging visitation. The results of this assessment are provided in the table below.

Item 16	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	3	7	3	13	48
Area Needing Improvement	4	8	2	14	52
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	15	5	27	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	3	4	5	12	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

There was some variation in performance on this item across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 60 percent of the St. Francis County cases, 47 percent of Pulaski County cases, and 43 percent of Pope County cases.

Item 16 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to support and/or strengthen the bond between parents and children through various activities. The table below identifies the activities as well as the number of cases relevant for each type of activity.

Effort Made	With Mother	With Father
Encourage the parents' participation in school activities and case conferences, attendance at doctors' appointments with the child, or engagement in the child's after school or sports activities?	10	4
Provide or arrange for transportation or provide funds for transportation so that the parent could attend the child's special activities and doctors' appointments?	6	1
Provide opportunities for therapeutic situations to help the parent and child strengthen their relationship?	9	4
Encourage the foster parents to provide mentoring or serve as role models to the parent to assist her/him in appropriate parenting?	4	2
Encourage and facilitate contact with incarcerated parents (where appropriate) or with parents not living in close proximity to the child?	2	1

Item 16 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the child's relationship with the father (six cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the child's relationship with either parent (eight cases).

Rating Determination

Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 48 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to support the parent-child relationships of children in foster care. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, in addition to stressing the need for family visitation, both training and policy discuss the importance of promoting and assuring family and child relationships are maintained. However, focus session participants voiced concern about the overwhelming workload of caseworkers, which affects their ability to help maintain those relationships.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders in Pulaski County reporting on this item during the onsite CFSR reported that the quality of case work, including promoting positive relationship between children and parents, was dependent upon the caseworker assigned. Other sites did not comment on this item during the Onsite Review.

III. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Well-Being Outcome 1

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percentage
Substantially Achieved	5	11	2	18	27.7
Partially Achieved	10	7	7	24	36.9
Not Achieved or Addressed	2	13	8	23	35.4
Total Applicable Cases	17	31	17	65	
Not Applicable Cases	0	0	0	0	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Status of Well-Being Outcome 1

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 27.7 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome was extremely low in all sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 35 percent of Pulaski County cases, 29 percent of Pope County cases, and 12 percent of St. Francis County cases. Performance also varied based on the type of case.

The outcome was found to be substantially achieved in 38 percent (15 cases) of the 39 foster care cases and 12 percent (3 cases) of the 26 in-home services cases.

Key Concerns From the 2001 CFSR

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1 in its 2001 CFSR. All items incorporated in this outcome were rated as ANIs. Key concerns identified in the 2001 CFSR were:

- Assessments conducted by caseworkers were of poor quality and often focused on one family dynamic.
- Cases, primarily in-home cases, were closed prematurely due to the lack of ongoing assessments.
- There was inconsistent engagement and involvement of children, families, particularly fathers, and/or foster parents in the development of case plans.
- Caseworkers were not conducting regular visits with the child or parent in accordance with DCFS policy. The quality of many visits between caseworkers, parents, and children appeared to be unfocused and perfunctory.

Arkansas implemented the following action steps to address the concerns of the 2001 CFSR:

- Strengthen the family assessment process to assure that service needs of children are identified and addressed in the case plan on an ongoing basis
- Revise the case planning process to ensure the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents are coordinated between providers and that appropriate parties, including noncustodial parents, are engaged and involved in the process
- Expand the array of services and address service gaps
- Ensure staff are aware of resources and services and how to access them
- Ensure the needs of the foster parent are met by expanding current support and specialized training for foster parents
- Revise the risk and family assessment process to include the development of a visitation plan

The State met its target goals for these outcomes by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

Similar to the 2001 CFSR, all items incorporated into this outcome were rated as ANIs in the 2008 CFSR.

The following concerns were identified in the 2008 CFSR:

- DCFS was more consistent in assessing and addressing the needs of foster parents and children than it was in assessing and meeting the service needs of mothers and fathers. Also, DCFS was more effective in assessing and addressing needs in foster care cases than it was in in-home services cases (item 17).
- DCFS continues to be challenged with involving parents, particularly fathers, in case planning (item 18).
- DCFS was not consistently effective in ensuring both the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with children (item 19).
- DCFS was not consistently effective in ensuring both the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with parents, particularly visits with fathers (item 20).
- Practice was driven by the CHRIS system and completion of forms and tools as opposed to best practice and ongoing informal assessments.

The 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, and foster parents

 Strength **X** Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 17 was applicable for all 65 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. This item excludes the assessment of children’s (but not parents’) needs pertaining to educational, physical health, and mental health needs as these are addressed in later items. The results of this assessment are provided in the table below.

Item 17	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	8	13	3	24	37
Area Needing Improvement	9	18	14	41	63
Not Applicable	0	0	0	0	0
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Performance on this item varied across sites, although it was low in all sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 47 percent of Pope County cases, 42 percent of Pulaski County cases, and 18 percent of St. Francis County cases. Performance also varied based on the

type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 54 percent (21 cases) of the 39 foster care cases, compared to 12 percent (3 cases) of the 26 in-home services cases.

Item 17 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the needs of children, parents, and foster parents had been adequately assessed and that identified service needs had been met. Item 17 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined that there was either inadequate assessment of needs or inadequate services to meet identified needs.

Specific case review findings for item 17 are shown in the table below. These data indicate that, for foster care cases, DCFS was more likely to assess and meet the needs of children and foster parents than it was to assess and meet the needs of mothers or fathers. DCFS was less effective in assessing and meeting the needs for the in-home services cases. DCFS was only effective in assessing and meeting the mother’s needs in 44 percent of the cases, the children’s needs in 35 percent of the cases, and the father’s needs in 14 percent of the cases reviewed.

Target person for needs assessment and services	Foster Care			In-Home Services		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Mother’s needs assessed and met?	18 (75%)	6 (25%)	24	11 (44%)	14 (56%)	25
Father’s needs assessed and met?	10 (50%)	10 (50%)	20	3 (14%)	19 (86%)	22
Child’s needs assessed and met?	35 (90%)	4 (10%)	39	9 (35%)	17 (65%)	26
Foster parent’s needs assessed and met?	32 (84%)	6 (16%)	38	NA	NA	NA

The Project for Adolescent and Child Evaluations (PACE) utilized for foster care children is comprehensive with recommendations for the needs and services of foster children. The information obtained and the recommendations made were not regularly followed. As a result, children in foster care did not always receive the needed services. Reviewers also noted that some service providers provided poor quality progress notes and reports. Parenting classes were noted to be generic and not individualized to the needs of parents served. The case reviews also demonstrated that practice was driven by CHRIS and forms as opposed to skilled informal assessments of underlying causes and other issues beyond the presented problem. In-home case reviews also demonstrated a focus on the target child and lacked a comprehensive assessment and provision of services for the parents and other children in the home.

Rating Determination

Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 37 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the State had adequately assessed and addressed the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCFS policy requires that the assessment of the family’s strengths, needs, and resources is to serve as the basis for developing individualized goals and service delivery to meet the family’s unique goals. The Family Strengths and Needs Assessment should be updated throughout the life the case. According to the Statewide Assessment, the only recent data on this item comes from the QSPR, which showed that needs assessment and the provision of appropriate services to meet those needs was rated as a Strength in 75.1 percent of the applicable cases.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders across the sites commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that foster parents’ needs are assessed by the caseworkers on a regular basis. Stakeholders reported foster parents are supported through foster parent association groups and contact with caseworkers. Stakeholders also commented on the availability of services. These comments are included under item 35 in the systemic factors section.

Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 18 was applicable for 59 (91 percent) of the 65 cases. A case was not applicable if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review, parents were not involved with the child in any way, and the child was too young or had cognitive delays or other conditions that were barriers to participation in case planning. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether parents and children (if age appropriate) had been involved in the case planning process, and if not, whether their involvement was contrary to the child’s best interests. 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. The results of this assessment are provided in the table below.

Item 18	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	3	12	3	18	31
Area Needing Improvement	12	18	11	41	69
Total Applicable Cases	15	30	14	59	
Not Applicable Cases	2	1	3	6	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 40 percent of Pulaski County cases, 21 percent of St. Francis County cases, and 20 percent of Pope County cases. Performance also varied substantially based on the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 45 percent (15 cases) of the 33 applicable foster care cases and 12 percent (3 cases) of the 26 in-home services cases.

Item 18 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that all appropriate parties had actively participated in the case planning process or that the agency had made concerted efforts to involve them in the case planning process. The item was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to involve the mother, father, and/or child (when age appropriate) in the case planning process. In some cases, there were no case plans completed during the period under review. In other cases, case plans were completed by the case manager, but there was no parent signature.

Specific information regarding involvement in case planning is provided in the table below. Data indicate that involvement of parents and children in case planning was a rare occurrence. However, mothers (54 percent) and children (50 percent) were more likely to be involved in case planning than were fathers (20 percent). The exclusion of fathers from case planning occurred even when fathers' whereabouts were known. Children were often not included in case planning activities if they were not at least 10 years old, regardless of their developmental capacity.

Involvement in Case Planning	Evaluation Results		No. of Applicable Cases
	Yes	No	
Mother involved in case planning?	28 (54%)	24 (46%)	52
Father involved in case planning?	9 (20%)	35 (80%)	44
Child (when age appropriate) involved in case planning?	22 (50%)	22 (50%)	44

Rating Determination

Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 31 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to involve parents and/or children in the case planning process. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, QSPR reviewers determined that the involvement of children and their families in the case planning process was a Strength in 73.3 percent of applicable cases.

The Statewide Assessment reports that on October 1, 2006, DCFS implemented new family strengths, needs, risk assessment, and case plan instruments. In 2007, surveys were received from 523 stakeholders with significant information about the development of case plans. The Statewide Assessment provided the following information from respondents:

- 37.8 percent of caseworkers reported that case plans are useful, user-friendly, and meet children’s needs in their current form; 41.7 percent reported that case plans are not useful in their current form.
- 37.5 percent of foster parents reported that case plans are useful, user-friendly, and meet children’s needs in their current form; 26.2 percent reported that case plans are not useful in their current form.
- 17.3 percent of the attorneys *ad litem* reported that case plans are useful, user-friendly, and meet children’s needs in their current form; 65.2 percent reported that case plans are not useful in their current form.
- Four juvenile judges reported that case plans are useful, user-friendly, and meet children’s needs in their current form; five judges reported case plans are not useful in their current form.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the process of developing a written case plan for each child, with all the required parties and within the required timeframes, was rated “very effective” by 17 percent of the staff; 55 percent described it as “somewhat effective”; and 24 percent felt it was “rarely effective.”

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, field staff identified the following issues and barriers regarding the case planning process:

- Caseworkers do not want to take children out of school just to participate in case plan development.
- Caseworkers do not always want to involve children because they are sensitive to the reasons why children were brought into foster care (e.g., sexual abuse).
- Caseworkers believe children do not care about or want to participate in developing the case plan.

The Statewide Assessment reports that fathers are involved in the case planning process when they are a part of the household or are the caregiver of the children. When fathers are not involved it is generally because he is not part of the household, the mother has not provided contact information for the father, or the mother does not want the father included.

Additional information regarding case planning is provided in the Systemic Factors section of this report under item 25.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The few stakeholders from Pulaski County and the State site commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that caseworkers are consistent in inviting parents and community partners to case planning staffings. Additional comments regarding the case planning process are provided in the Systemic Factors section of this report under item 25.

Item 19. Worker visits with child

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 19 was applicable for all 65 cases. In conducting the assessment of this item, reviewers were to determine whether the frequency of visits between the caseworkers 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 are presented in the table below.

Item 19	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	10	13	7	30	46
Area Needing Improvement	7	18	10	35	54
Not Applicable	0	0	0	0	0
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

The item was rated as a Strength in 59 percent of Pope County cases, 42 percent of Pulaski County cases, and 41 percent of St. Francis County cases. Performance on the item varied based on the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 56 percent (22 cases) of the 39 foster care cases and 31 percent (8 cases) of the 26 in-home services cases.

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. Item 19 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- The frequency of caseworker visits was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, and the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (12 cases).
- The frequency of caseworker visits with children was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, although when visits did occur, they were substantive (three cases).
- The frequency of caseworker visits was sufficient, but the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (11 cases).
- There was a long period of time during the period under review in which the agency caseworker did not visit the child (nine cases).

Specific information regarding the frequency of visitation is provided in the table below.

Typical frequency of caseworker visits with child (during the period under review)	Foster Care Cases	In-Home Services Cases
Visits occurred at least weekly	7 (18 %)	0
Visits occurred less than weekly, but at least twice a month	8 (20 %)	8 (31 %)
Visits occurred less than twice a month, but at least once a month	14 (36%)	5 (19%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	10 (26%)	10 (38%)
Visits did not occur	0	3 (12%)
Total Cases	39	26

Rating Determination

Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 46 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children were of sufficient frequency and/or quality. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, policy states that DCFS will maintain a level of contact with the family adequate to protect the health and safety of the child, to protect the child from further child maltreatment, and to provide family support. The Statewide Assessment notes that DCFS “acknowledges the importance of caseworker contact with children in foster care and believes that these visits should be in the home as often as possible. However, face-to-face visits in other locations can meet best practice objectives.”

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, QSPR data indicate that caseworker visits with children was determined to be a Strength in 65 percent of the applicable cases. The Statewide Assessment also reports that data from the ARCs indicate that the percentage of monthly caseworker visits occurring for children in foster care decreased from 72 percent in SFY 2003 to 53 percent in SFY 2006 and to 57 percent in SFY 2007.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders across the sites commenting on this item indicated that quality and quantity of caseworker contacts with children varies based on the caseworker. The stakeholders reported that barriers to frequent and high quality contacts included staff turnover, inadequate staff training, lack of supervisory support, and time restraints due to other job responsibilities.

Item 20. Worker visits with parents

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 20 was applicable for 52 (80 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable for this assessment if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved in the lives of their children. All cases that were not applicable were foster care cases. Reviewers were to assess whether caseworkers’ face-to-face contact with the children’s 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 are presented in the table below.

Item 20	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	5	11	1	17	33
Area Needing Improvement	8	16	11	35	67
Total Applicable Cases	13	27	12	52	
Not Applicable Cases	4	4	5	13	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 41 percent of Pulaski County cases and 38 percent of Pope County cases, compared to 8 percent of St. Francis County cases. There also was variation based on the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 46 percent (12 cases) of the 26 applicable foster care cases, compared to 19 percent (5 cases) of the 26 in-home services 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. Item 20 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- Visits with the mother and father were not of sufficient frequency and/or quality (19 cases).
- Visits with the mother were not of sufficient frequency and/or quality (three cases).
- Visits with the father were not of sufficient frequency and/or quality (13 cases).

Specific information pertaining to the frequency of caseworker visits with parents is provided in the table below.

Typical Frequency of Caseworker Visits With Parents	Foster Care Cases		In-Home Services Cases	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Visits occurred on a weekly basis	7	3	0	0
Visits occurred less than weekly but at least twice a month	5	1	7	1
Visits occurred less than twice a month but at least once a month	3	2	5	1
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	7	3	13	6
Visits did not occur	4	10	1	15
Not Applicable	13	20	0	3
Total Applicable Cases	26	19	26	23

Additional findings were the following:

- For the 26 foster care cases and 26 in-home cases for which visits with mothers were applicable, there were 25 cases (48 percent) in which these visits occurred less than once a month or not at all.
- For the 19 foster care cases and 23 in-home cases for which visits with fathers were applicable, there were 34 cases (81 percent) in which these visits occurred less than once a month or not at all.

Rating Determination

Item 20 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 33 percent of the 52 applicable cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and/or quality of caseworker visits with parents were sufficient to monitor the safety and well-being of the child or promote attainment of case goals. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, data from the QSPR show that caseworker visits with parents was rated as a Strength in 64 percent of applicable cases.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review reported that high caseloads and inexperienced caseworkers are barriers to conducting quality visits with parents.

Well-Being Outcome 2

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Pope	Pulaski	St. Francis	Total	Percentage
Substantially Achieved	9	13	10	32	71.1
Partially Achieved	0	3	2	5	11.1
Not Achieved	1	3	4	8	17.8
Total Applicable Cases	10	19	16	45	
Not Applicable Cases	7	12	1	20	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Status of Well-Being Outcome 2

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 71 percent of the cases reviewed. This is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. There were differences in performance on this outcome across sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 90 percent of Pope County cases, compared to 68 percent of Pulaski County cases and 62 percent of St. Francis County cases. There also was some variation in performance based on the type of case. The outcome was substantially achieved in 81 percent of the 26 applicable foster care cases, compared to 46 percent of the 13 applicable in-home services cases.

Key Concerns From the 2001 CFSR

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2 in its 2001 CFSR. Key concerns identified were:

- Educational needs were assessed; however, there was not evidence that the agency followed up or provided the recommended services.
- Preschool children identified as educationally delayed did not receive subsequent assessments.
- There was a lack of educational advocacy for children, specifically for alternative educational programs.
- Educational assessment and service records were not well maintained.

Arkansas took the following steps to address educational needs of the child:

- Developed and implemented a Memorandum of Understanding with the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) on meeting the educational needs of children in foster care
- Provided training to the OCC attorneys, judges, court personnel, attorney *ad litem*, and CASA on meeting the educational needs of children in foster care
- Provided training for caseworkers on meeting the educational needs of children served by DCFS
- Developed policy and procedures to meet the educational needs of children served by DCFS
- Revised the family assessment and case planning process to ensure children’s educational needs are met and services documented

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

The key findings of the 2008 CFSR indicate that the concerns found in the 2001 CFSR continued to exist. DCFS did not adequately assess educational needs of children and in some cases did not pursue services even when educational needs were noted.

Item 21. Educational needs of the child

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 21 was applicable for 45 (69 percent) of the 65 cases reviewed. Cases were not applicable if any of the following applied: (1) children were not of school age or (2) children in in-home cases did not have service 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 are provided below.

Item 21	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	9	13	10	32	71
Area Needing Improvement	1	6	6	13	29
Total Applicable Cases	10	19	16	45	
Not Applicable Cases	7	12	1	20	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Item 21 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child’s educational needs were appropriately assessed and services were provided, if necessary. Item 21 was rated as an ANI in 13 cases when case reviewers determined the following:

- There was a lack of assessment of educational needs even when there was clear evidence that the child was experiencing school-related problems (nine cases, seven in-home services cases, and two foster care cases).
- Educational needs were identified and noted in the case record, but no services were provided to address those needs and educational issues were not included in the case plan (four foster care cases).

Rating Determination

Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 71 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to meet the educational needs of children. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for this item to be rated as a Strength. A 95 percent standard is established for this item because it is the only item included in the outcome.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCFS policy states that it is the responsibility of DCFS to ensure that foster children are afforded educational opportunities to assist them in reaching their full potential. Data from the QSPRs indicate that DCFS’s effectiveness in providing children in its care with appropriate educational services was rated as a Strength in 87.6 percent of the applicable cases. The Statewide Assessment reports that children in foster care receive adequate educational services. The initial assessment process includes an assessment of the child’s educational needs. It is a DCFS requirement that a copy of the child’s education records be attached to the case plan and CHRIS captures educational services information on the Education screen.

In Statewide Assessment meetings referenced in the Statewide Assessment, stakeholders shared that children in foster care move too often and the moves disrupt the educational process. Stakeholders suggested that DCFS track “education milestones” to ensure services are not interrupted. It also was reported in the Statewide Assessment that DCFS staff need training on educational services, school system requirements, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and special educational services.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Although Arkansas law requires that each school system have a liaison for children in the custody of DCFS, stakeholders reported that this is not occurring in all areas. Stakeholders in Pulaski and St. Francis counties expressed the opinion that the school systems are hesitant to work with foster children, and there are delays of up to 1 week in getting children enrolled in school. Stakeholders reported that IEPs are not always individualized or timely, and the special education services available do not always meet the needs of children served by DCFS. Stakeholders across the sites indicated that placement disruptions hinder children’s educational progress.

Stakeholders also voiced concern about DCFS’s lack of involvement in the IEP process. Foster parents were viewed by some stakeholders as educational advocates for children in foster care.

Well-Being Outcome 3

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved	8	17	8	33	62.3
Partially Achieved	3	3	1	7	13.2
Not Achieved or Addressed	1	7	5	13	24.5
Total Applicable Cases	12	27	14	53	
Not Applicable Cases	5	4	3	12	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Status of Well-Being Outcome 3

Arkansas did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 62.3 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome varied slightly across sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 67 percent of Pope County cases, 63 percent of Pulaski County cases, and 57 percent of St. Francis County cases. Performance varied substantially based on the type of case reviewed. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 74 percent of the 39 foster care cases and 33 percent of the 20 applicable in-home services cases.

Key Concerns From the 2001 CFSR

The State was not in substantial conformity with this outcome for the 2001 CFSR. Key concerns were:

- There were inconsistencies in the assessment and follow-up of health services for in-home cases.
- Health needs were identified in some cases but follow-up was insufficient.
- Mental health needs often were not assessed or addressed.
- Mental health needs of children with behavioral problems often were not assessed. In addition, their parents' mental health needs were not assessed.

Arkansas took the following steps to address the physical and mental health of the child:

- Revised and strengthened the family assessment and case planning process, including court-ordered cases
- Provided consultation through the PACE program to all DCFS service areas not completing medical assessment follow-up to ensure recommended services were provided
- Ensured that new caseworkers are aware of available mental health services and how to access them
- Increased the percentage of children in foster care receiving initial and ongoing health/medical services
- Revised policies and procedures related to mental health services
- Provided initial and ongoing training to caseworkers on assessing mental health issues

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

Similar to the 2001 CFSR, the physical and dental health of children (item 22) and mental health of children (item 23) were rated as ANIs in the 2008 CFSR. The case reviews revealed continued inconsistency in practice with regard to provision of health assessments of children and obtaining health records. There were also inconsistencies in practice in terms of assessing and addressing the mental health needs of children. The Onsite Review findings indicate that DCFS is more consistent in meeting the medical and mental health needs of children in foster care cases than children in in-home cases.

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 **X** Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 22 was applicable for 42 (65 percent) of the 65 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable 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 (including dental needs) had been appropriately assessed, and (2) whether the services designed to meet those needs had been, or were being, provided. The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 22	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	9	14	8	31	74
Area Needing Improvement	2	7	2	11	26
Total Applicable Cases	11	21	10	42	
Not Applicable Cases	6	10	7	23	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Performance on this item varied across sites. This item was rated as a Strength in 82 percent of Pope County cases, 80 percent of St. Francis County cases, and 67 percent of Pulaski County cases. There also was variation based on the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 89 percent of the 39 applicable foster care cases and 25 percent of the 4 applicable in-home cases. The case reviews did find that PACE assessments drove outcomes when the recommended services were provided. The case review sites were found to have access to Medicaid providers, including dental care providers.

Item 22 was rated as a Strength in 31 cases when reviewers determined that children’s health needs (medical and dental) were routinely assessed and identified needs were addressed by services. Item 22 was rated as an ANI in 11 cases in which DCFS did not meet the medical or dental needs of the child. Eight of the cases rated as ANIs were foster care cases and three were in-home cases. A summary of the cases identified as ANIs follows:

- In one in-home case there was no indication in the case record of any medical assessment or services even though the child tested positive for an illegal substance at birth.

- In one in-home case, medical/health concerns were noted by the caseworker, yet there was no formal assessment and services were not provided.
- In one in-home case, medical needs were assessed and identified, but no services were provided.
- In two foster care cases, dental services were not provided.
- In four foster care cases there were no assessments of physical or dental health noted in the case file.
- In two foster care cases the child did not receive routine medical care during the period under review.

Rating Determination

Item 22 is rated as an ANI. Reviewers determined that the agency was effective in assessing and meeting the physical health needs of children in 74 percent of the cases, which does not meet the 90 percent required for an overall rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCFS is to ensure that all necessary medical services are provided to children receiving out-of-home placement services. Policy requires an initial screening within 72 hours of removal, or 24 hours if the child is removed because of severe maltreatment. DCFS is to ensure recommended treatment and services are provided promptly. DCFS policy also requires a PACE assessment within 60 calendar days of a child's removal from home. A Medical Passport, a summary of the child's health history and current health status, is to be completed for each child in foster care and is to be provided to the child's caregivers.

QSPR reviewers rated DCFS performance in the area of physical health to be a Strength in 91.5 percent of the applicable cases reviewed.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders across the sites commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DCFS is effective in assessing the physical and medical needs, including dental needs, of children receiving foster care services. Each child, according to stakeholders, receives a PACE assessment within 60 days of entering care. The assessment includes speech, hearing, physical, psychological, and developmental screenings and exams, and identifies areas that require attention. The thoroughness of the comprehensive health assessment for children who enter foster care was praised by several stakeholders; however, the lack of follow through on the recommendations of the evaluation was reported as a problem.

Stakeholders in all sites reported that dental and medical services that accept Medicaid are available, although stakeholders in Pope County reported that Medicaid providers are limited.

Many stakeholders noted that foster parents primarily ensure children’s medical and dental needs are met.

According to stakeholders at the review sites and State level, in addition to the PACE assessment, a Medical Passport is maintained on each child in foster care and given to each placement provider. The passport is established at the time of placement, with the initial information having been obtained from the parents, and is updated with additional medical information as it becomes available. Some stakeholders, however, expressed the opinion that many foster parents do not receive the assessment information or the Medical Passport. Stakeholders note the PACE assessment often includes medical recommendations, but follow-up varies across the State.

Item 23. Mental health of the child

 Strength **X** Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 23 was applicable for 40 (62 percent) of the 65 cases reviewed. Cases were not applicable if the child was too young for an assessment of mental health needs, or if there were no mental health concerns. 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 are presented in the table below.

Item 23	Pope County	Pulaski County	St. Francis County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	7	16	4	27	67
Area Needing Improvement	2	5	6	13	33
Total Applicable Cases	9	21	10	40	
Not Applicable Cases	8	10	7	25	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

*Figures displayed may not total to 100% due to rounding.

There was some variation in performance on this item across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 78 percent of Pope County cases, 76 percent of Pulaski County cases, and 40 percent of St. Francis County cases. There also was variation in performance based on the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 81 percent of the 21 applicable foster care cases, compared to 43 percent of the 14 applicable in-home services cases.

Item 23 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that children’s mental health needs were appropriately assessed and addressed. Item 23 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- Mental health needs were not assessed or addressed (six cases—two foster care and four in-home cases).
- Although needs were assessed, there was a delay of several months in providing mental health services (two cases—one foster care and one in-home services case).
- Services were provided but they were not appropriate to the child’s needs (two cases—one foster care and one in-home case).
- Initial or ongoing mental health assessments were not conducted, yet some services were provided (three cases—two foster care cases and one in-home services case).

Ratings Determination

Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 67 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to address the mental health needs of children. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in Arkansas’s 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, following the initial screening and comprehensive health assessment, DCFS is to ensure that periodic medical, dental, mental health, vision, and hearing evaluations are conducted by qualified providers according to the periodicity schedules adopted by the Arkansas Department of Health. Data from the QSPR on DCFS’s effectiveness in assessing the mental health needs of children in foster care and providing appropriate services was rated as a Strength in 90 percent of the applicable cases.

Stakeholder Interview Information

According to stakeholders, the PACE assessment includes a mental health assessment. However, stakeholders expressed concern about the delays in scheduling mental health appointments and the poor quality of some of the assessments.

Many stakeholders indicated that accessing mental health services sometimes is a problem because a child must have a referral from a primary care physician to receive mental health services and a new referral must be obtained every 6 months. This often causes delays in obtaining and continuing mental health services.

Various stakeholders across the sites and at the State level identified the following additional barriers to providing adequate mental health service to children:

- Limited staffing of mental health centers across the State
- High turnover rate of mental health staff

- Children's frequent moves
- Limited funding to assist non-Medicaid-eligible families in receiving mental health services

SECTION B: SYSTEMIC FACTORS

This section of the CFSR Final Report provides information regarding Arkansas’s substantial conformity with the seven systemic factors examined during the CFSR. Information on the items included under each systemic factor comes from the Statewide Assessment and interviews with stakeholders conducted during the onsite CFSR. It should be noted that ratings for the systemic factors are not based on single comments from an individual stakeholder; however, these comments are included in the report when they provide important insight or clarification regarding the State’s performance on a particular systemic factor.

A score for substantial conformity is established for each systemic factor. Scores of 3 and 4 represent substantial conformity. Scores of 1 or 2 mean that a State is not in substantial conformity with the requirements of the systemic factor. Specifically, a score of 1 is given when none of the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) or program requirements is in place. A score of 2 indicates that some or all of the CFSP or program requirements are in place, but more than one of the requirements fails to function as described in each requirement. A systemic factor is rated a 3 when all of the CFSP or program requirements are in place and no more than one of them fails to function as described. A rating of 4 is given when all of the CFSP or program requirements are in place and functioning.

Information also is provided regarding the State’s performance on each systemic factor for the State’s first CFSR. If the systemic factor was part of the State’s PIP, the key concerns addressed in the PIP and strategies for assessing those concerns are noted.

I. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

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

Status of Statewide Information System

Arkansas is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. The State was in substantial conformity with this factor in the 2001 CFSR; therefore, Arkansas was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Specific findings for the item included in this systemic factor and the reason for the item rating are presented 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 12 months, has been) in foster care

X **Strength** ____ **Area Needing Improvement**

Item 24 is rated as a Strength because the statewide information system can identify the legal status, demographic characteristics, goals, and placement of every child who is in foster care. Since the 2001 CFSR, the State has made several enhancements and improvements to the system. DCFS created an Eligibility and Medicaid “interface” with CHRIS to better track children’s IV-E and Medicaid status. The State increased quality, accountability, and appropriateness of Medicaid-reimbursed behavioral health care services and created a standardized screening and assessment process. The State developed an outcome-based data system to support improved tracking, accountability, and decision-making.

This item was rated as a Strength in the 2001 CFSR; therefore, it was not required to be addressed in the PIP.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State has maintained CHRIS since 1997. Division policy requires that staff document all casework activity in CHRIS. The system provides the necessary data to meet Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), and SACWIS requirements.

CHRIS is statewide and accessible to all county offices. It also is accessible to the Arkansas State Police CACD; select staff members at Arkansas Children’s Hospital; and contracted service providers, on a limited basis, through the Contracted Financial Management (CFM) and Provider Information Entry (PIE) interface.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that CHRIS is a fully longitudinal database that permits tracking of children from the time they enter the child welfare system through the time they leave it. CHRIS data include child characteristics, location, and case plan goals. Additional information collected and entered into CHRIS includes:

- Basic client information
- Family strengths, needs, and risk assessment
- Case plans
- Service referrals and/or court-ordered services

- Court activities to include hearing dates, judicial determinations, court orders, the judges conducting the hearings, involvement of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) volunteers and attorneys *ad litem*
- Staff visits with the child/family
- Reasons for any removal, including exit from foster care
- Type of all placements experienced by a child during his or her stay in foster care
- Placement resource information
- Plan for the child in his or her current placement
- Date, time, and reason for all visitation

The system produces reports through “CHRIS Net,” which provides informational reports available to all authorized CHRIS users. According to the Statewide Assessment, CHRIS Net reports are refreshed nightly to ensure they always provide the most current information. The reports are used to monitor performance and ensure data quality.

Information in the Statewide Assessment indicates CHRIS has been enhanced since the 2001 CFSR with new interfaces and new functions to include the Family Strength, Needs, and Risk Assessment and Case Plan screens to better capture the family’s unique characteristics and circumstances and develop more responsive case plans; Eligibility and Medicaid interfaces that allow DCFS to better track foster children’s title IV-E and Medicaid status; and implementation of CFM and PIE, completed in 2006.

From August 9, 2007, to September 21, 2007, DCFS conducted 13 focus sessions with stakeholders from across the State to include DCFS staff, title IV-E partners, judicial representatives, and health service workers. During focus sessions with field staff, they indicated the CHRIS system has the necessary information, provides the required fields of data, and is generally accessible and efficient. Staff stated the system has come a long way since the old system and hardcopy files. They also stated that continual improvements have been made to the system since its implementation in 1997.

The following concerns regarding CHRIS were identified during focus groups held in preparation for the Statewide Assessment:

- There are still areas of redundancy within the system.
- The same information has to be entered onto multiple screens.
- “Pick” lists in the system do not always relate to the families and children being served, their needs, and/or their issues.
- The Family Strengths and Needs Assessment is not flexible and is very lengthy.
- CHRIS did not reduce the number of forms and reports that field staff must complete.
- CHRIS has significantly increased the time it takes caseworkers to complete “paperwork.”

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders across the sites and at the State level commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that CHRIS captures important information related to the safety, permanency, and well-being of children who are in foster care or in-home, including their location, demographic information, and case goals. The stakeholders identified the reports generated by CHRIS Net as beneficial. They also noted the current system is used to report required data to NCANDS and AFCARS.

Stakeholders at the review sites identified the following concerns regarding CHRIS:

- Dual data entry
- Lack of interface with other systems, e.g., Food Stamps, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and child care
- Complexity and lack of flexibility of the Family Strength, Needs, and Risk Assessment and Case Plan screens
- Lack of user-friendliness and time needed to complete the assessment and case plan
- Discourages flexibility in developing individualized case plans

II. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

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

Status of Case Review System

Arkansas is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. The State was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2001 CFSR; therefore, Arkansas was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Specific findings for each item included in this systemic factor and the reasons for item ratings are 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 **X** Area Needing Improvement

Item 25 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because, although the State has developed a process for engaging parents in the development of the case plan, it does not occur on a consistent basis nor does it always include both parents. Also, case review information indicates that parents and children were involved in case planning in only 31 percent of the 59 applicable cases. Furthermore, data from the State's QSPR determined that involvement of children and their families in case planning was a Strength in 73 percent of cases reviewed.

This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2001 CFSR. As part of the PIP, DCFS developed a strategy to improve case assessments and case planning.

The following were the key strategies implemented in the 2001 PIP:

- DCFS developed automated practice tools that collect information from the Health and Safety Risk Assessment, Family Strength and Needs Assessment, and Case Plan and systematically link the information into a working document.
- The agency worked with the National Resource Centers to develop a training module that focuses on strengthening worker skills for case planning with family involvement.
- The agency implemented a directive that informed staff statewide of its expectation that case plans will be developed with family involvement and based on comprehensive assessments.
- The PIP strategy included a standard supervisory review process; supervisors would use the process to guide caseworkers in development of improved case plans involving families and monitor development of the plans.
- DCFS will work to ensure that caseloads are reasonable so staff will have sufficient time to involve families in case plan development.
- The agency will identify and plan for needed supports for staff so they can develop case plans with family involvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the case plan is a written document between the family and DCFS that outlines a plan of services. It addresses the family's needs, building on its strengths, and outlines the roles and responsibilities of all involved parties. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, State policy requires that initial case plans be completed within 30 days of the opening of an in-home service case or a removal from home, whichever occurred first. The assessment notes that, in practice, the case plan should be the result of engagement of the family to complete a written, comprehensive assessment that identifies strengths, risks, and underlying conditions/needs that create the risks. However, the assessment also notes that field staff reported in their focus groups that involvement of the mother, father, and age-appropriate children does not always occur, and when there is involvement, it usually is with the mother.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, field staff indicated that the timeframe allotted to complete the initial case plan, 30 days, is very brief and, therefore, caseworkers just try to “get it done to meet the timeframes in policy.”

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders across the sites commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR suggested that DCFS prepare case plans for children in foster care and receiving in-home services cases and that the case plans are developed in a timely manner. While the stakeholders reported timeliness of case plan development, they also reported inconsistent levels of involvement from the families. Some stakeholders across the sites reported that some case plans tend to be “boilerplate,” primarily because CHRIS limits case planning flexibility and the plans are not “user-friendly” for the families. Several stakeholders noted that the court order greatly influences the contents of the case plan. It also was indicated that although case plans are revised every 3 to 6 months, at times only the date changes.

Generally, stakeholders across the sites reported a case plan is prepared by a caseworker prior to a family centered staffing with the family and revised with input from those present at the staffing. Stakeholders also reported that case planning activities revolve around a process as opposed to ongoing involvement from the family. According to stakeholders, youth are aware of the contents of their case plans and many have seen and signed their plans; however, involvement in creation of the case plan is inconsistent. Stakeholders in St. Francis County reported that incarcerated parents are encouraged to be involved in case plan development; however, this does not consistently occur.

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

 X **Strength** **Area Needing Improvement**

Item 26 is rated as a Strength because the State provides a process for periodic review of the status of each child at least every 6 months, with many occurring every 3 months. In addition, stakeholders at the three review sites confirmed the timeliness of periodic reviews. At the time of the onsite CFSR, the State did not collect data on the timeliness of periodic reviews. However, results from the Arkansas Title IV-E Foster Care Secondary Eligibility Review conducted August 7–11, 2006, and September 19–21, 2006, indicated timeliness of case review hearings as a Strength.

This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2001 CFSR; therefore, Arkansas was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the status of each child in an out-of-home placement, including children placed out-of-State, is examined no less than every 6 months by a judicial review. The reviews determine the safety of the child, continued need for and appropriateness of the placement, extent of compliance with the case plan, and extent of progress made toward alleviating or mitigating the causes necessitating the placement. The reviews also are to project a likely date by which the child may be returned and safely maintained at home or placed for adoption or legal guardianship. During each 6-month review, the court makes a determination based on the best interests of the child. Although 6-month reviews are required, in some judicial districts the reviews are held every 3 months.

Stakeholder Interview Information

It should be noted that the ACF Regional Office staff and CB representatives requested State-level interviews with representatives from the court system and/or Court Improvement Project (CIP), but were not able to secure the interviews during the Onsite Review.

Most stakeholders across the sites commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that cases are being reviewed at least every 6 months, and in most jurisdictions reviews are occurring more frequently. Stakeholders also indicated that, in general, the case reviews are substantive and help move cases forward in terms of achieving case goals and objectives. A few stakeholders indicated that although continuances do occur statewide, they are rare.

Pope County stakeholders indicated the court generally sets review hearings every 3 months. They said that the next hearing is scheduled by the court at the conclusion of the current hearing. According to Pope County stakeholders, the local court believes the frequency of reviews improves the effectiveness of the review and parental motivation, which increases the speed and success of reunifications.

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

 X Strength ___ Area Needing Improvement

Item 27 is rated as a Strength because the State ensures permanency hearings are held no later than 12 months from the date of entry into foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter. In addition, stakeholders at the three review sites confirmed the timeliness of permanency hearings. Although at the time of the onsite CFSR Arkansas did not collect data on permanency hearings, the State's Title IV-E Foster Care Secondary Eligibility Review, conducted August 7–11, 2006, and September 19–21, 2006, indicated

that case review hearings were timely and findings of “contrary to the welfare” and “reasonable efforts to prevent removal” consistently appeared in court orders. In addition, the findings of “reasonable efforts to finalize the permanency plan” were made every 3–4 months, indicating significant judicial involvement in foster care cases.

The State has placed an emphasis on the timeliness of permanency by conducting permanency hearings that are typically more in-depth and require higher evidentiary standards than other review hearings.

This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2001 CFSR; therefore, Arkansas was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCFS policy requires each child in an out-of-home placement, including children placed out-of-State, to have a permanency planning hearing within 12 months of the date the child is considered to have entered foster care, and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter during the continuation of foster care. A permanency hearing also is held after a child has been in an out-of-home placement for 15 of the previous 22 months, excluding the time spent while the child is on a trial home placement or runaway status.

The Statewide Assessment notes that in some areas of the State, DCFS Area Managers and field supervisors have quarterly meetings with judges in an attempt to improve the quality and effectiveness of permanency hearings. In focus group sessions, the OCC agency attorneys and attorneys *ad litem* stated that permanency planning hearings were timely.

Stakeholder Interview Information

It should be noted that the ACF Regional Office staff and CB representatives requested State-level interviews with representatives from the court system and/or CIP, but were not able to secure the interviews during the Onsite Review.

Across the review sites, most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that Arkansas has placed emphasis on the timeliness of permanency hearings. They noted that although continuances may occur, they are infrequent. Stakeholders indicated that the length of time to locate absent parents often leads to continuances. Stakeholders in all the review sites indicated the permanency hearings typically are more in-depth and require higher evidentiary standards than other review hearings. They said the permanency hearings focus on issues surrounding permanency and the efforts the agency and/or family is making to achieve permanency for the child.

Pope County stakeholders indicated that to ensure the timeliness of permanency planning hearings there, during every hearing the judge reviews the time the child has been in foster care. Pulaski County stakeholders reported that one judge schedules permanency

planning hearings every 9 months, while another judge will schedule a permanency planning hearing if there is a lack of parental progress on the case plan prior to the 12-month mark.

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

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 28 is rated as an ANI because the State has a process for TPR; however, court continuances occur when efforts to locate absent parents, primarily fathers, are not completed in a timely manner. There is no documentation of compelling reasons to support not pursuing TPRs. At the time of the onsite CFSR, the State did not collect data on the process of terminating parental rights. However, data from the onsite CFSR indicate TPR had not been filed on time in 9 of the 22 cases applicable for TPR, and compelling reasons for not filing were noted in only 2 of the 9 cases. This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2001 CFSR; therefore, Arkansas was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, when the court determines that reunification services will be terminated, it holds a permanency planning hearing within 30 days of the determination. If the court then determines TPR should occur, DCFS files a petition to terminate parental rights within 30 days from the date of the entry of the order establishing the goal. The court conducts and completes a TPR hearing within 90 days from the date the petition for termination is filed, unless the case is continued for good cause. The Statewide Assessment reports that stakeholders participating in focus group sessions said the State is effective in filing TPRs.

Stakeholder Interview Information

It should be noted that the ACF Regional Office staff and CB representatives requested State-level interviews with representatives from the court system and/or CIP, but were not able to secure the interviews during the Onsite Review.

Stakeholders across the sites commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that, in general, DCFS and the courts follow Federal guidelines with regard to filing for TPR in a timely manner, holding TPR hearings on time, and documenting compelling reasons when a TPR petition is not filed. According to some stakeholders, TPRs are occurring more frequently because of an increase in methamphetamine use and its effects on children.

Despite the State’s general diligence in filing for TPR in a timely manner, various stakeholders across the sites identified the following concerns:

- Delays in the TPR process due to insufficient agency efforts to locate absent parents, particularly fathers
- Delays in the TPR process due to judicial findings allowing the parents additional time to meet their case plan requirements
- Unwillingness on the part of DCFS and the courts to pursue TPR if the child is not considered “adoptable” because of age, physical or mental disabilities, or history of sexual offenses

A number of stakeholders said that there has been an increase in the number of appeals of TPRs. According to stakeholders, a recent appellate ruling has shortened the appeal timeframes and minimized the information required for an appeal. It was noted, however, that TPRs are rarely overturned.

Item 29. Provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 29 is rated as an ANI because although the State has a process and policy in place for caseworkers to provide notification of hearings to foster parents and relative caregivers, notification is not consistent or timely. There is also inconsistency in courts for foster parents and relatives to be heard during hearings. At the time of the onsite CFSR, Arkansas did not collect data on hearing notifications to foster parents and relative caregivers.

This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2001 CFSR; therefore, Arkansas was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, State policy requires that DCFS provide foster parents of a child, and any pre-adoptive parent or relative providing care for the child, with timely notice of, and an opportunity to be heard in, permanency hearings and 6-month periodic reviews held regarding the child during the time he or she is in their care.

The Statewide Assessment notes that CHRIS provides ticklers to alert staff to send out notices of hearings and reviews for children in foster care. However, the assessment also notes that staff participating in focus groups described the notification process as an area needing improvement. They attributed this to their large caseloads, which make it difficult for them to keep up with notices of hearings and reviews. In focus groups, some foster parents said they received notification; others said they received notification but it was not in a timely manner, and still others said they did not receive any notification at all.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Although notification does not always occur, stakeholders at all sites commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that caseworkers are notifying relatives, foster parents, and adoptive parents of hearings on a rather consistent basis. The method of notification varies statewide between verbal notice and e-mail notice by the caseworker. Pope County stakeholders said foster parents there receive a copy of the court order, on which the next hearing date is indicated.

Stakeholders at the review sites also expressed the opinion that the opportunity for foster parents, relative caregivers, and pre-adoptive parents to be heard in hearings varies across the State. Active engagement and opportunity for foster parents to be heard depends primarily on the presiding judge. They noted that in some courts, foster parents are not allowed in the courtroom; in other counties, they are allowed in the courtroom, but only as observers. However, some judges will permit caregivers to testify in court or will allow the attorney *ad litem* to provide information from the caregiver.

Some stakeholders indicated that even when they receive notices, not all foster parents attend the hearings. Various stakeholders across the sites attributed lack of attendance by foster parents to the time spent waiting for court hearings, foster parents not having a voice in court, and wanting to be viewed as a neutral party. Stakeholders reported that in some areas, caseworkers, attorneys, and CASA volunteers provide hearing results to caregivers who were not allowed or were unable to attend the hearings.

III. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

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

Status of Quality Assurance System

Arkansas is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of QA System. The State was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2001 CFSR; therefore, Arkansas was not required to address the factor in its PIP.

Specific findings for each item included in this systemic factor and the reasons for item ratings are presented 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 State has implemented standards for approval of foster family homes to ensure the safety and health of children in foster care, including a process for quarterly monitoring visits and annual evaluations and reevaluations of foster homes. The State also reviews all foster home files and physically monitors homes to ensure the safety and health of children in foster care. A comprehensive health assessment is completed on each child entering foster care, and all health care information is maintained in a Medical Passport that is provided to the foster parent. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State's 2001 CFSR; therefore, Arkansas was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCFS has standards for approval of family foster homes, including safety standards. The State also has minimum licensing standards for child welfare agencies, developed in conjunction with the Child Welfare Agency Licensing Board. The licensing standards address the safety issues for foster homes and require the agency that approves the foster home to conduct quarterly monitoring visits, annual reevaluations, and reevaluations each time there is a major life change in the home (e.g., death, divorce, marriage).

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCFS was licensed as a child placement agency by the Child Welfare Licensing Board in December 2002. The Child Welfare Agency Licensing Unit, which is a part of DCFS and reports to the Child Welfare Licensing Board, conducts annual reviews of foster home files in each DCFS area and provides a report. In 2004, this unit began reviewing 100 percent of all files. Each area develops a corrective action plan to correct any identified deficiencies. In addition, this unit conducts physical inspections of foster homes, noting any safety hazards and other licensing issues.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Based on information provided by stakeholders across review sites during the onsite CFSR, the State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect their safety and health. Stakeholders at the State level noted that placement service providers, including DCFS, group homes, and child care institutions, are licensed by the Child Welfare Agency Licensing Board. They also noted that program specialists conduct site visits to providers to ensure providers are meeting standards. Stakeholders said the licensing worker monitors the providers quarterly to ensure continued compliance with safety standards, and a reevaluation is completed annually. In addition, stakeholders reported that unless there is a waiver, foster care

caseworkers visit foster children on a weekly basis to monitor safety. Stakeholders reported that a PACE is completed through Children’s Hospital on each child who enters foster care.

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 X Area Needing Improvement

Item 31 is rated as an ANI because, while the State has an identifiable QA system unit with a process that includes use of QSPRs and a supervisory case review (SCR) process, those two key processes were not fully implemented during the period under review. In addition, it is unclear whether the QA system includes a comprehensive and effective monitoring process, with a clear feedback loop, of foster homes, child care institutions, and child-placing agencies. This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2001 CFSR; therefore, Arkansas was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

The State enhanced its QA system after the 2001 CFSR as a part of the PIP, including development of the QSPR, modeled after the Federal CFSR and an online supervisory review process. However, the Onsite Review showed that during the period under review, QA staff were reassigned to other units due to workload issues; therefore, the QSPRs were not conducted as originally scheduled. In addition, the Onsite Review indicated that staff turnover and the large worker caseload did not allow for consistent and timely SCR’s.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCFS maintains its own QA staff of four and a unit manager and contracts with Hornby Zeller Associates, Inc. (HZA) for additional QA services and data analysis. The Statewide Assessment notes that in addition to QA staff, CHRIS staff generate a number of QA-relevant reports that are available online through CHRIS Net. These reports are useful for performance monitoring and improving data quality.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, State QA staff members conduct the ongoing QSPRs. The QSPRs were initiated as part of DCFS’s PIP to provide ongoing measurement of the outcome domains that form the basis of the CFSR. QA staff members also provide “troubleshooting” services on an ad hoc basis to parts of the State experiencing certain problems.

The Statewide Assessment reports that DCFS also created an online SCR process. The SCR was described in the assessment as an in-depth review of the direct service work performed by the caseworkers with their families. SCR is used by DCFS field staff and

management to determine progress in meeting case and CFSR goals. It includes an evaluation of the child and/or family's progress toward achieving case plan goals and any issues or needs of the child and family receiving services.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that DCFS's in-house QA capabilities are supplemented by HZA, which maintains an onsite staff of seven. HZA produces a number of regular and ongoing performance monitoring reports for DCFS, including the Quarterly Performance Reports (QPRs) and ARCs. In addition, HZA produces the monthly Compliance Outcome Report (COR) that tracks performance on 35 measures down to the level of individual caseworkers. The various performance indicators reported in CORs, QPRs, and ARCs were developed collaboratively between DCFS and the State legislature, and were designed to be consistent with State and Federal laws and policies as well as generally accepted best-practice standards.

The Statewide Assessment reports that services provided by direct agency staff are monitored in several ways. The COR is issued monthly and provides detail down to the caseworker level on compliance with numerous requirements pertaining to service delivery. A QPR is compiled monthly and shared with a standing legislative committee. In addition, supervisors use the Supervisory Review Tool to review a set number of cases per caseworker each month for compliance with policy and practice guidelines. CHRIS produces a variety of online and ad hoc reports to track service delivery and outcomes.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders across the review sites responding to this item during the onsite CFSR expressed concern about the QA process, particularly over the past year. They reported that QA activities in the past year decreased considerably because most QA staff were on temporary assignment in the field due to numerous supervisor and caseworker vacancies. Some stakeholders suggested that the lack of QA staff has had a negative effect on the QA system.

Although reviews have not been occurring the past year, stakeholders reported that in practice the QA unit conducts monthly area reviews using a version of the CFSR tool. Stakeholders reported that the reviews rely primarily on quantitative data. Upon completion of the review, a report of the findings is submitted to the area directors and a corrective action plan is completed by the area and submitted to the central office. In addition, the area is to submit QPRs.

There is not, however, a process to ensure corrective actions are implemented and use of the data from the reviews is not clear. Stakeholders across the sites reported that information from reviews is not consistently shared with field staff. In addition, there are several quality improvement reports generated through CHRIS; however, according to stakeholders they are unable to determine how these data are being used and what effect they are having on policy, practice, or training. Stakeholders were also unclear on how the SCR results are used to improve matters.

IV. TRAINING

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

Status of Training

Arkansas is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. The State was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2001 CFSR; therefore, it was not required to address the factor in the PIP.

Specific findings for each item included in this systemic factor and the reasons for item ratings in this round are presented 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 **X** Area Needing Improvement

Item 32 is rated as an ANI because the State has a training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP and is available to all staff who deliver these services, but the onsite CFSR indicated that the initial training for staff is not easily accessible and, therefore, hinders service delivery. The inability to complete caseworker training in a timely manner impacts caseworkers’ ability to carry full caseloads, just as the inability to complete supervisory training impacts supervisors’ ability to perform their tasks. Caseworkers are sometimes assigned a full caseload prior to completing the training. At the time of the onsite CFSR, the State did not collect and/or analyze data regarding the effectiveness of the training.

This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2001 CFSR. Though the State was not required to address this factor in the PIP, it implemented changes to enhance training, including but not limited to a competency-based training that combines classroom, field, and online training. As part of the new training sequence, caseworkers should maintain a maximum workload of just five secondary cases prior to completion of training. DCFS also developed and implemented supervisor training.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, all new caseworkers are to begin new worker training within the first 2 weeks of hire, or when a new worker training has been scheduled. This training consists of 22 days of classroom instruction conducted over a 10-week period. Classroom instruction consists of training in family-centered practice (including cultural diversity); dynamics of maltreatment; effects of abuse on human development; casework communications; effects of separation and placement; child maltreatment assessment; foster care and out-of-home placements; and case management, assessment, planning, and coordinating efforts. Due to the intensity of the new worker training and assigned on-the-job training requirements and responsibilities, the caseworker trainee can carry a maximum workload of five cases on which he or she is the secondary caseworker.

According to the Statewide Assessment, meetings were held in March and April 2007 to discuss new caseworker training. Stakeholders expressed the following concerns regarding the training.

- Agency and field supervisors may not have operational knowledge of the on-the-job training and new worker training requirements before and during the training process.
- There is a lack of standardized and consistent field instructor support for new workers during their first year of employment. Some may not receive any mentoring services (e.g., adoption specialists or new resource workers).
- Large caseloads and increasing administrative responsibilities reduce the opportunity for supervisors to be involved with trainees during training and orientation.
- DCFS staff do not have general knowledge of the contents of DCFS's Training Plan.

The Statewide Assessment reports that training also is provided for new supervisors. As indicated in the assessment, DCFS Supervisor/Leadership Training, which was enhanced in 2002, is a competency-based training for new supervisors and program managers consisting of 9 days of classroom instruction conducted over a 3-week period. The training also includes a series of online tutorials to be completed outside the classroom and purposeful interaction with a field instructor/mentor. Classroom instruction is provided in three segments: Principles of Leadership, Working with Others, and Nuts and Bolts of Supervision.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders across the sites commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR reported that caseworker training is a 10-week competency-based training that combines classroom and field training. Stakeholders at the review sites expressed various opinions on how long it is before caseworkers begin classroom training after being hired. Some stakeholders indicated that caseworkers begin training 1 to 2 weeks after being hired, while others said it can take 1 to 2 months for some caseworkers to start training. However, a few stakeholders stressed that with the on-the-job component, training actually begins prior to classroom training.

Stakeholders at the State level said that in addition to classroom instruction, all new caseworkers are assigned a field instructor. At the end of the training, the instructor meets with the caseworker and supervisor to develop an individualized training plan for the caseworker. Stakeholders also said that new caseworkers are mentored for 1 year, and the frequency of contact with the mentor depends upon the needs of the individual caseworker. Some stakeholders reported inconsistencies in the availability and assignment of mentors once training is completed.

According to stakeholders in Pulaski County and at the State level, Arkansas CACD investigators receive the hotline operator training but do not receive training on recognizing child maltreatment or assessing risk and safety of children. It was noted, however, that CACD investigators frequently have experience as DCFS caseworkers.

Some stakeholders across the sites reported that the new caseworker training is adequate to prepare caseworkers to carry out the responsibilities of their jobs. Other stakeholders, however, noted that although the training is theoretically sound, it does not prepare caseworkers for the reality of the child welfare practice. Stakeholders also noted that although caseworkers are allowed to have up to five secondary cases during their training, many are assigned more than five cases before they complete the training and often are the primary caseworker on one or more of those cases.

According to stakeholders at the State level, data related to training indicate there are numerous job-related distractions during training. For example, caseworkers often miss training because they have to appear in court or address a child's removal. Stakeholders across the sites reported that training participants believe classroom training is not in line with actual child welfare practice. Several stakeholders responded that for the training to be a success for the caseworker, supervisors must see and support the relevance of training and be active partners, as the transference of learning from the classroom to the field will not occur without supervisory support. Stakeholders do not believe supervisory support is occurring consistently.

Stakeholders in Pope County, St. Francis County, and at the State level reported that the State has title IV-E funded contracts with several colleges and universities in the State for a stipend program in social work or programs with child welfare emphases. Students receiving the stipend are obligated to work for DCFS 1 year for each year the stipend was received. Stakeholders reported that caseworkers hired from these programs are better prepared for work in child welfare than caseworkers who did not participate. They noted that this has resulted in more stable workforces in some local offices.

According to stakeholders, new supervisor training is a Governor-mandated curriculum. Training includes DCFS and DHS components. Supervisory training examines basic leadership, conflict resolution, administrative policy, and supportive and educational roles. Stakeholders reported that supervisors are not able to get into training as quickly as caseworkers, and sometimes are in their

supervisor position for several months before training is available. Opinions of the training differed greatly among stakeholders. Some believed the training is substantive and prepares for the position of supervisor. Others said it does not prepare for the position.

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 X Area Needing Improvement

Item 33 is rated as an ANI because, while the State provides ongoing training and has implemented individual training plans for caseworkers, case responsibilities, travel distance, and lack of travel funds often prevent staff from receiving ongoing training. This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2001 CFSR; therefore, the State was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers are required to complete 24 hours of in-service training during the year. An individual training plan is developed once the caseworker completes new worker training. The plan outlines suggested areas of training for the caseworker. In addition to the training plan, the State’s title IV-E training partnership assigns a mentor to work with the caseworker during his or her first year of employment once initial training has been completed. In addition, CHRIS maintains information about training opportunities provided by the training contractor, MidSouth, and the title IV-E training partnerships. Other training attended by the caseworker is entered into CHRIS by his or her supervisor.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders across the sites responding to this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that ongoing training is readily available to DCFS staff and a required number of hours must be completed each year. Most stakeholders also suggested that, for the most part, supervisors are supportive of ongoing training and staff has the opportunity to attend. They noted, however, that there are sometimes barriers to attending training, such as staff shortages, caseload responsibilities, the need to travel long distances to access the training, and lack of travel funds. Workload demands do not allow staff time to complete online training, especially since access to online training is only available in the DCFS office. Stakeholders said caseworkers receive e-mails announcing training opportunities, but staff turnover makes it difficult for all caseworkers to maintain the kinds of knowledge needed to address special issues in child welfare, such as educational issues for children in foster care.

Stakeholders across the sites reported that an individual training plan is created for each caseworker and the plan is based on the individual needs of the caseworker. They said that ongoing training is scheduled to meet those needs. The training registration process allows the caseworker or supervisor to register an individual for training; however, supervisory approval is needed for attendance.

Stakeholders indicated that staff are required to attend grief and loss training and worker safety training annually, although some stakeholders suggested this is redundant. Stakeholders reported that DCFS staff are generally successful in having their training needs met when able to attend, either by agency-developed trainings or trainings offered by outside agencies or organizations. DCFS has a process to enter and track training progress of staff; however, the Onsite Review did not indicate whether supervisors utilize the CHRIS training information to manage or assess staff training needs.

Stakeholders commented favorably on the substance abuse training that is conducted on a regular basis, particularly training to help caseworkers in situations where methamphetamine abuse is a concern.

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 ANI. Although the State has requirements for 27 hours of pre-service training for prospective foster/adoptive parents and 15 hours of annual in-service training for licensed foster parents, the available training does not sufficiently address or enhance the skills and knowledge of the foster parents. The State provides opportunities for training at Foster Care Association meetings and an annual foster care conference. Surveys and stakeholder interviews conducted as part of the Statewide Assessment indicated that although foster parents believe pre-service training is adequate and effective, they would like to see enhancements to the training to include online training, greater accessibility in rural areas, and efforts to seek foster parent input on subject matter. In addition, stakeholders identified barriers to ongoing training. This item was rated as a Strength in Arkansas's 2001 CFSR; therefore, Arkansas was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, all prospective foster and adoptive care applicants are required to attend the Foster/Adopt Parents Resource for Information, Development, and Education (PRIDE) training curriculum, which consists of nine 3-hour modules. Each foster parent must complete a minimum of 15 hours of annual approved training after licensing. In addition, all foster and adoptive parents are required to attend classes and be certified in first aid and CPR.

A survey was completed by 86 foster parents attending a DCFS-sponsored conference in October 2006. The survey results were that 81.4 percent of foster parents reported that the pre-service training adequately prepared them to be foster parents, and 90.7 percent said the ongoing training had been adequate and useful. However, only 63.8 percent of foster parents said the ongoing training was

held at convenient times and places. The Statewide Assessment does not indicate that training on cultural diversity is offered to foster parents.

The Statewide Assessment provided the following comments from the surveys related to what DCFS should do about foster/adoptive training.

- Make annual recertification competency-based rather than based on the number of training hours attended. If foster parents have the measurable skills to perform their job, they do not need to warm a bench for 15 hours every year.
- Let foster parents do more online training to get the required annual training hours.
- Reduce training hours for foster parents who have been fostering for 5 years or more.
- Provide training on the weekends and provide child care for training.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders across the sites commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR noted that foster, adoptive, and relative foster parents are required to complete PRIDE training. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that PRIDE's 9-week timeframe is too long and could easily be condensed. Stakeholders also said that prospective parents often must wait to access training because there must be five families for a class to take place. However, stakeholders noted that PRIDE has a component for individualized training for a single family.

Several stakeholders at the State level praised the PRIDE curriculum and noted it has a proven track record if it is implemented as intended. However, other stakeholders said the training does not adequately prepare parents for the reality of fostering. These stakeholders noted that the training provides theoretical but not practical information. In addition, stakeholders reported that training is not sufficiently specific or individualized to meet the needs of the foster families. Stakeholders identified the following topics needed in initial foster parent training:

- Preparing foster parents for reunification
- Managing behavioral problems
- Substance abuse issues, specifically on methamphetamine use
- Federal and State regulations of fostering
- Consistent statewide expectations and responsibilities of foster parents

Once training is completed, DCFS has 30 days to complete a home study.

According to stakeholders across the sites, DCFS foster and pre-adoptive parents are required to complete 15 hours of training annually. Stakeholders were in agreement that there are numerous ongoing training opportunities for foster parents, including foster

parent association monthly meetings, MidSouth training, and the annual foster parent conference. However, stakeholders noted that there are more training opportunities in urban areas than rural areas. Stakeholders indicated that barriers to attending training are lack of child care during the training and inconvenient locations and times for training.

Pope County stakeholders reported that foster parents are invited to “lunch and learn,” a training opportunity for child welfare agency staff and foster parents that is held quarterly. However, stakeholders indicated that foster parents do not often attend this training.

Stakeholders also indicated that additional training is needed for therapeutic and group home providers.

V. SERVICE ARRAY

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

Status of Service Array

Arkansas is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. The State was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2001 CFSR; therefore, it was not required to address the factor in the PIP. The general finding of the 2008 CFSR was that, although there were services such as PACE, the array of services is not sufficient to address the needs of children and families served by the child welfare system. Key service gaps were noted in the areas of behavioral health, substance abuse treatment, sexual abuse victim and offender treatment, IFS, domestic violence services, Spanish-speaking services, therapeutic foster care, and respite care. In addition, services were generally available in the major metropolitan areas of the State; however, many rural areas were without adequate services.

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 X Area Needing Improvement

Item 35 is rated as an ANI because although there are many services available in the State, the high number of referrals and complex needs of families often exceed the resources and quality of services available. Services such as domestic violence shelters, substance abuse treatment, sexual abuse treatment, and intensive family preservation are available but cannot meet the needs of families. In addition, during the onsite CFSR, item 17, pertaining to assessment of needs and provision of services, was rated as a Strength in 37 percent of the cases reviewed. Item 22, which addresses the physical health needs of children, was rated a Strength in 74 percent of the cases reviewed. Item 23, which assesses provision of services to meet mental health needs of children, was rated a Strength in 68 percent of the cases.

This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2001 CFSR, yet the State developed strategies and action steps in an effort to address areas of service array in the State that impacted outcomes for children. The impact of the strategies from the PIP were not addressed in the Statewide Assessment.

Key strategies implemented in the 2001 PIP included the following:

- Reviewed and prioritized service needs and contracts to reflect existing budget allocations and ensure efficient utilization of limited resources
- Revised information sharing mechanisms to ensure staff are aware of services and how to access them
- Ensured adequate services are available while the child is in foster care and after returning home
- Expanded current supports and specialized services for foster parents to help stability of foster care placements
- Developed a service directory informing staff, providers, consumers, and other stakeholders of DCFS service array

Arkansas completed the action steps for this item by the end of the PIP period.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State provides an array of services that can meet the ever-increasing challenges presented by the families and children that it serves. DCFS approves and supervises foster homes and purchases services from licensed child welfare agencies, community mental health centers, individuals licensed for independent practice, and psychiatric hospitals. Services

available are parenting groups and classes; individual and family counseling; school-based service collaboration; drug/alcohol assessment and treatment for parents and foster children; comprehensive and residential treatment for foster children; therapeutic foster care; emergency shelters; respite care for biological families, foster families, and adoptive families; IFS; and day care.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that DCFS staff attending focus sessions did not feel DCFS has the individual services to meet the needs of the children and families it serves. The assessment further reports that foster and adoptive families, providers, and other community stakeholders recognize the area of service array as problematic.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that service delivery by contracted providers is monitored through a review of billing at the local and State levels, review of compliance with performance indicators in the contracts, compliance certifications sent in by the provider, onsite visits, audits, and QA reviews.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders across the sites commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that Arkansas has an array of services available to assist families. However, many stakeholders questioned the quality of services.

Stakeholders identified the following strengths regarding to service array:

- There are numerous mental health centers throughout the State, although some are open only part time.
- The State has funding to help non-Medicaid-eligible families receive mental health services, although the funding is limited.
- Some inpatient drug treatment services allow children to remain with their mothers while their mothers are in treatment.
- Parenting classes are available throughout the State.
- IL services are available to youth throughout the State.

Stakeholders identified the following gaps with regard to service array:

- Parenting curriculum not addressing individual needs of families and lack of a child interaction component
- Long wait lists for substance abuse treatment programs, particularly inpatient programs
- Lack of drug treatment programs for youth and pregnant and parenting women
- Lack of drug treatment focusing on methamphetamine abuse
- Lack of placement resources for older children, children with specific behavioral needs, sex offenders, and medically fragile children
- Lack of respite care services
- Only four child psychiatrists in the State
- Lack of domestic violence shelters and services across the State, including services for aggressors

- Lack of sexual abuse treatment providers for victims and offenders
- Lack of transportation for parents to visit their children placed in specialized treatment programs
- Lack of intensive family preservation services and wraparound services
- Lack of flexible spending funds
- Lack of anger management classes
- No family visitation facilities
- No coordination of services between providers

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

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 36 is rated as an ANI because the Onsite Review identified a lack of services available in all areas of the State to meet the needs of families served, especially in rural areas. Substance abuse treatment, domestic violence services, and placements for children in foster care were among the services with limited availability statewide. IL services are not available statewide due to lack of transportation and referral to the program by the primary worker. As discussed in item 23, stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSP indicated that accessing mental health services is sometimes a problem because a child must have a referral from his or her primary care physician in order to receive mental health services. In addition, a new referral must be obtained every 6 months. This often causes delays in obtaining and continuing mental health services.

This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2001 CFSP; therefore, Arkansas was required to address this item in its PIP. However, the Statewide Assessment did not address the impact of the strategies developed in the 2001 PIP.

Key strategies implemented in the 2001 PIP included the following:

- Expanded the current array of services and addressed service gaps, especially in rural areas, to meet the needs of children and families served by DCFS
- Developed a needs assessment to assist in determining the availability, quality, and importance of contracted services, as well as any barriers to accessing those services

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCFS has more flexibility in providing direct services than contracted services. Most services are available to families and children statewide, but some service availability is restricted by a lack of funding or the capacity of the provider community.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the following services as not available statewide:

- Transportation, especially in rural areas
- IFS
- Placements for children, especially for those with challenging behaviors, older youth, and sex offenders
- Substance abuse assessments and inpatient and outpatient treatment
- Sexual abuse treatment for victims and offenders
- Inpatient mental health services
- Domestic violence shelters and services
- IL services
- Hispanic service providers
- Hearing-impaired service providers

Stakeholder Interview Information

Many stakeholders across the sites commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that most services are available in the lower socioeconomic areas and rural areas, but are more limited than they are in other areas of the State. Waiting lists are longer and the quantity of services is smaller in these areas.

By comparison, stakeholders noted that Little Rock (Pulaski County) has an abundance of services, and waiting for services there is not an issue. Stakeholders in Pope and St. Francis Counties reported that the lack of transportation often is a barrier to families accessing key services associated with their case plan. Stakeholders in these rural counties reported that caseworkers and social service aides spend a substantial amount of time providing transportation.

Stakeholders also noted that residential treatment and group home placements are not readily available in rural areas, which results in children being placed outside their community and away from their families. St. Francis County stakeholders indicated that dental care for children is an issue in their community due to limited providers.

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

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 37 is rated as an ANI because the Onsite Review identified that the State does not consistently individualize services to meet the needs of children and families. Many services are not available or individualized to meet the needs of families, such as parenting.

Coordination and communication are lacking between service providers. In addition, during the onsite CFSR, item 17, pertaining to assessment of needs and provision of services, was rated as a Strength in 37 percent of the cases reviewed. Item 22, which addresses physical health needs of children, was rated a Strength in 74 percent of the cases reviewed. Item 23, which assesses provision of services to meet mental health needs of children, was rated a Strength in 68 percent of the cases.

This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2001 CFSR, yet the State developed strategies to address the issue of services to meet the individualized needs of children and families. The Statewide Assessment did not address the impact of the strategies on this item.

Key strategies implemented in the 2001 PIP included the following:

- Developed a needs assessment to help determine the availability, quality, and importance of contracted services, as well as any barriers to accessing them
- Reduced service gaps by aligning resources with service needs
- Expanded the current array of services and addressed service gaps, especially in rural areas, to meet the needs of children and families served by DCFS

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, most of the State, particularly the southwestern and northwestern portions, have seen a significant increase in the number of Hispanic families, and the northwestern part has a large population of Marshall Islanders. The assessment notes that differences in language, culture, and permanency resources are barriers for field staff. As indicated in the assessment, the State has worked with the statewide Spanish language newspaper and the Mexican consulate to address issues concerning the Hispanic population and contracts for statewide language interpretation. DCFS has begun to print critical publications in Spanish and actively recruit Hispanic foster and adoptive parents.

Other barriers to providing individualized services that were identified in the Statewide Assessment include:

- Programs that do not have the expertise to serve the specific/unique needs of children's mental health diagnoses
- Substance abuse relapse due to minimal time allowed in inpatient drug treatment
- Need for parenting classes to meet specific needs of parents by including curriculum and methods to teach low-functioning parents and parenting coaches that can assist, monitor, and model good parenting choices
- Inconvenient hours of operation for services for working families

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the agency recognizes the need to tailor services to the individual circumstances of the family. Stakeholders mentioned that court orders focus on "boilerplate" services, but

the agency will tailor those and provide additional services to meet the needs of the family. Several stakeholders commented that when specific services are not available in a particular community, many providers and caseworkers are creative in arranging them for the child and family.

Stakeholders at the State level indicated that there is limited flexible funding at the local level to assist agencies in obtaining services for families. However, St. Francis stakeholders said the county has funding to provide temporary assistance to families to prevent removals and assist with reunification.

Some stakeholders reported that the State has culturally competent services to serve the large Hispanic population; however, many expressed the opinion that there is room for improvement in this area. Parenting classes are available across the State, nevertheless, stakeholders noted the classes are not always effective or adequate to meet the needs of the families, nor are they geared to different ages and developmental needs of children. Another issue with service provision to parents is the lack of services available after normal work hours to accommodate working parents. Stakeholders also reported that preventive services are available in the State; however, they do not believe the services are frequently used.

VI. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

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

Status of Agency Responsiveness to the Community

Arkansas is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. Arkansas was also in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2001 CFSR; therefore, the State was not required to address the factor in its PIP.

The general finding in the 2008 CFSR is that the State includes the input of stakeholders in development of annual reports of progress and services. The CFSR found coordination between DCFS and other Federally-assisted programs to meet the service needs of the children and families served by the agency. The CFSR also found the State does consistently engage in ongoing consultation with key stakeholders to obtain their input regarding goals and objectives of the CFSP.

Specific findings for each item included in this systemic factor and the reasons for item ratings are presented 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

X **Strength** _____ **Area Needing Improvement**

Item 38 is rated as a Strength because the State has actively engaged external stakeholders, the courts, CASA, foster parents, advisory boards, and DCFS staff in the development of its CFSP. While Arkansas does not have any federally recognized Tribes, it is bordered by States that have large Tribal populations. However, Arkansas has not made efforts to engage or involve any Native American representatives in development of its CFSP. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2001 CFSR; therefore, Arkansas was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, in May 2004, more than 50 community stakeholders met for 2 days to participate in the development of the State's CFSP. During this 2-day meeting, stakeholders and DCFS staff collaborated to outline vital areas, identify key barriers, and suggest solutions to include in the CFSP.

According to the Statewide Assessment, at the State level, DCFS created an advisory board in 2004 to advise it on the Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR) and other aspects of agency operations and functioning. Part of the board's mandate is to ensure the organization's policies and performance uphold the public interest, and to serve as the bridge between DCFS and the public.

The advisory board meets quarterly and includes DCFS staff (caseworker, supervisor, area manager), a foster parent, adoptive parent, DCFS provider, consumer of DCFS services, CASA volunteer, juvenile court judge, legislator, attorney *ad litem*, OCC attorney, mental health provider, representative of the disability community, educator, representative of the faith community, and other members at large.

The Statewide Assessment reports that DCFS administers a consumer satisfaction survey to a statistically valid sample of persons served, such as parents, foster youth, and foster and adoptive families. For each survey conducted, a report is produced detailing the results. Periodically, focus sessions are conducted with field staff. The purpose of this process is to gather information to assess its service delivery and plan for improving services.

The Statewide Assessment reports that DCFS has an active Youth Advisory Board, which is made up of youth from the 10 DCFS areas. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, the board meets quarterly and is facilitated by foster youth, with support and guidance from DCFS staff. The board members review agency policy, identify key issues around practice and service needs, and prepare information for events such as foster parent conferences and trainings for court personnel.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the various committees, advisory groups, and panels provide input into DCFS's strategic direction.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Several stakeholders across the sites commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that DCFS has an advisory board that is involved in all aspects of the title IV-B CFSP, including review of the plan prior to submission. The board is composed of a court representative, member of the legislature, CASA representative, foster parent, and mental health and health care personnel. According to local-level stakeholders, each service area has a committee that submits recommendations to the State advisory committee. In general, stakeholders suggested that community involvement in the State CFSP plan is strong.

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

X **Strength** ___ **Area Needing Improvement**

Item 39 is rated as a Strength because the State has consulted with external stakeholders in annual reports of progress and services delivered following the CFSP. The State created an advisory board for the purpose of input on the APSR and the Statewide Assessment. However, Arkansas has not attempted to establish Native American representation in development of the CFSP. With that exception, this item remains a strength. The item also was rated a Strength in the 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment

According to the Statewide Assessment, at the State level, DCFS created an advisory board in 2004 to advise DCFS on the APSR and other aspects of agency operations and functioning.

The Statewide Assessment reports that DCFS has an active Youth Advisory Board, which is made up of youth from the 10 DCFS areas. As noted in the assessment, the board meets quarterly and is facilitated by foster youth, with support and guidance from DCFS staff. The board members review agency policy, identify key issues around practice and service needs, and prepare information for events such as foster parent conferences and trainings for court personnel.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State regularly collaborates on developing the APSR using the DCFS advisory board at the State and committees at the local level.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 40 is rated as a Strength because DCFS has many efforts in place to coordinate services and benefits between child welfare and other Federal or Federally-assisted programs. The agency meets with the Advisory Board and other Federally-assisted programs to assess services and make recommendations for services needed. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2001 CFSR; therefore, Arkansas was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCFS has implemented several initiatives to engage communities in the shared responsibility for the well-being of children across the State. DCFS maintains ongoing collaboration with external stakeholders at the local and State levels, including the mental health and the university systems.

DCFS has signed agreements with local mental health centers for delivery of services to DCFS clients in their communities. In addition, DCFS has strong relationships with universities across the State for training and continuing program development. The objectives of DCFS's title IV-E partnership with local universities are to (1) develop a family-centered child welfare curriculum, (2) infuse the curriculum into interdisciplinary academic curricula statewide, (3) recruit and prepare university/college students for employment with DCFS, and (4) better prepare child welfare workers and supervisory staff for the child welfare practice.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders across the sites commenting on this item expressed the opinion that DCFS has strong collaboration with key stakeholders to build a State system that supports children and families. Stakeholders indicated DCFS has a positive collaborative relationship with child support, TANF, Medicaid and Medicaid providers, Head Start, and the Food Stamps Program. Stakeholders at the State level reported that DCFS collaborates with Medicaid and Medicaid providers to ensure children's medical needs are met. Pulaski County stakeholders reported there is leadership training for managers of different agencies to assist in positive collaboration.

Stakeholders at the State level described a grant that the State received in 2005 from the National Center for Substance Abuse and Child Welfare. This grant was awarded jointly to DCFS and the Department of Behavioral Health. The purpose of the grant is to

provide resources to substance-abusing mothers and provide a family-centered treatment program. The collaboration on this grant includes Medicaid as well. Stakeholders noted that DCFS is in communication with Medicaid to expand Medicaid services to include substance abuse treatment for pregnant woman, adolescents, and women with children, and expand the availability of inpatient and intensive outpatient drug treatment services.

Stakeholders in Pulaski County mentioned a collaboration between DCFS and ADE. Through this collaboration, human services workers, who are employees of both DCFS and ADE, are assigned to individual schools to address problems that arise for some of the children. Stakeholders noted that the program can provide food, clothing, and personal items for the children; provide school supplies; and advocate for families with their school systems. This program works with the entire school population and is focused on prevention of child maltreatment.

Some stakeholders at the State level mentioned the Children’s Case Review Committee, which is composed of directors of different agencies including DCFS, Medicaid, mental health, and ADE. Stakeholders said that when services for a particular family or child cannot be obtained at the local level, the case is reviewed by the committee to determine how to best meet the child’s and family’s needs.

VII. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

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

Status of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

Arkansas is not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor. The State was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2001 CFSR; therefore, it was not required to address the factor in the PIP.

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 Arkansas has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards. This item also was rated a Strength in the State’s 2001 CFSR; therefore, Arkansas was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the Child Welfare Licensing Act is the legal authority by which the Child Welfare Agency Review Board prescribes minimum licensing standards for child welfare agencies, which include foster and adoptive placement, and residential, psychiatric residential, sex offender, and IL programs. The board promotes and publishes rules and regulations setting minimum standards governing the granting, revocation, refusal, and suspension of licenses for a child welfare agency and operation of a child welfare agency.

The Statewide Assessment reports that kinship foster homes are homes where adult relatives within the first, second, or third degree of relationship to the parent or stepparent are recruited by the caseworker to provide 24-hour-per-day care for children who are related through blood or marriage. These homes must meet all of the minimum licensing requirements for a family foster home. Relatives who are approved for placement of children in their home may choose to be a kinship foster home or regular foster home. Kinship homes are approved only for placement of relative children. If the relatives choose to be a regular foster home, they have the responsibility of caring for relative and nonrelative foster children.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the Child Welfare Agency Licensing Unit conducts annual reviews of foster home files in each DCFS area and provides a report. The unit also reviews files of residential and therapeutic foster care programs. The unit conducts physical inspections of foster homes, noting any safety hazards and other licensing issues. The Statewide Assessment notes that recommendations are made to request that the home meet standards, and some homes have closed as a result of the onsite inspection.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders across the sites commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated the State has consistent licensing standards for group homes, child care institutions, and child placement agencies. According to stakeholders at the State level, the Child Welfare Agency Review Board makes the final decision about licensing based on recommendations of the Child Welfare Licensing Unit. The

board has the authority to deny an application, revoke or suspend a previously issued license, and issue letters of reprimand or caution to agencies.

According to stakeholders, for a child care placement agency to be licensed, the following criteria must be met:

- Staff must pass a criminal background check.
- At least two staff members must be master’s level licensed social workers.
- Staff must have annual training, including CPR.
- Staff must comply with confidentiality requirements.

Stakeholders noted that onsite reviews are conducted annually by licensing staff and include both record reviews and interviews with children. Stakeholders also noted that licensing standards for foster homes require yearly evaluations, which include home safety checks. In addition to the formal evaluations, stakeholders reported that caseworkers are in the foster homes and child care facilities on a weekly basis, and will address any safety or health issues they observe.

Stakeholders in Pope County advised that homes can receive a provisional license when a relative resource for a child has been located but is not licensed. For a home to receive a provisional license, it must meet the minimum standards for a foster home and complete expedited State and local background checks. However, training prior to the child’s placement is not required, nor is the FBI check required until the resource relative has completed foster parent training. If the relative does not complete training and licensing requirements within 6 months, the child must be moved to a licensed foster home or the relative must obtain guardianship of the child.

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 X Area Needing Improvement

Item 42 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because, although DCFS has established minimum standards for licensed family foster homes and child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds, the implementation and effectiveness of the minimum licensing standards were not uniformly apparent. In addition, stakeholders reported during the Onsite Review that one group home required children to participate in religious activities or face disciplinary actions. It is unclear whether this situation is due to lack of clarity in the Licensing Act standards regarding residents’ right to practice their religion of choice, or whether this situation represents a lack of adequate monitoring by the Child Welfare Agency Review Unit. There was no evidence during the Onsite Review that family foster care providers have disregard for birth families’ and youths’ civil rights with respect to the practice of their religion of

choice. The agency requires all homes to follow the same approval requirements and conducts annual and quarterly monitoring visits to all foster homes, group homes, and child care institutions.

This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2001 CFSR; therefore, the State was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Statewide Assessment

According to the Statewide Assessment, there are three types of DCFS foster homes: foster family home (nonrelative), relative foster home (kinship only), and relative foster home (fostering and kinship). There is no distinction in approval requirements between kinship foster homes and all other approved foster homes in Arkansas. The Statewide Assessment reports that DCFS policy dictates that, for the purpose of title IV-E eligibility, individuals and agencies providing 24-hour out-of-home care for children will be held to consistent standards of care and licensing. Provisional family homes that are approved must be held to the same standards as foster family homes that are licensed. Anything less than full licensure or approval is insufficient for meeting title IV-E eligibility requirements.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that licensing standards are generally applied equally for all providers, although they noted that families who are related to the child in their care can receive a provisional license.

According to stakeholders at the State level, the Child Welfare Licensing Board has the authority to grant religious exemptions. The child-placing agencies granted a religious exemption are not “licensed” but have to meet safety and health standards. At the time of the onsite CFSR, there were no child-placing agencies with religious exemptions.

Stakeholders in Pope County reported that in at least one agency providing residential services for children and youth, residents are required to participate in community church services of the agency’s preference and similar faith-based activities within the individual cottages. Neither the youth nor their birth/legal parents reportedly were consulted about their religious preferences at the time of placement. Failure to attend the required activities is considered a violation of facility rules, with resultant loss of privileges or other disciplinary measures for noncompliance.

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

X Strength _____ Area Needing Improvement

Item 43 is rated as a Strength because DCFS continues to require and conduct criminal background checks for all foster and adoptive parents prior to approval. The State’s Title IV-E Foster Care Secondary Eligibility Review, conducted August 7–11, 2006, and September 19–21, 2006, did not indicate issues with criminal background checks. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2001 CFSR; therefore, Arkansas was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCFS policy requires the following: “DCFS shall place children in approved foster homes where the foster parents have satisfactorily completed DCFS’s pre-service training curriculum, have been cleared through the Central Registry and through a local and state criminal records background check.” The Statewide Assessment notes that a State criminal records check must be completed for each household member age 14 and older and must be repeated every 5 years. In addition, a local criminal records check must be completed for each household member age 14 years and older and must be repeated every 2 years. The Statewide Assessment indicates an FBI criminal record check must be requested for families who have not resided in Arkansas continuously for the past 5 years. The criminal record check must be completed prior to requesting the FBI criminal record check.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders at all sites commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DCFS requires criminal background clearances for all licensed foster homes and staff of licensed child care facilities. Information from the stakeholder interviews is consistent with information provided in the Statewide Assessment. However, stakeholders noted that there are significant delays, often up to 3 months, in receiving the FBI results. Stakeholders reported that this is due to the use of manual fingerprinting.

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 ANI because, although DCFS has several activities in place for the purpose of foster home recruitment, there is no effective statewide process that recruits for general and specialized foster homes reflecting the ethnic and racial diversity of the population and/or children in foster care. In addition, although DCFS has a process to recruit foster homes for specific children through the Adoption Coalition, there is no data to determine whether the recruitment efforts actually increased the number of licensed foster homes available for these children.

This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2001 CFSR; therefore, the State was not required to address this factor in its PIP. However, the State developed strategies to address the needs of foster home recruitment and retention of existing foster homes.

Key strategies implemented in the 2001 PIP included the following:

- Increased by 10 percent the number of foster parents recruited who are willing to accept children with special needs
- Developed an exit interview process for foster parents in an effort to address retention of foster homes
- Implemented and monitored the statewide adoption recruitment plan in order to increase homes for African-American children
- Increased by 10 percent approved adoptive homes to meet the needs of teenagers, non-African-American children, sibling groups of three or more children, and children with disabilities

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, each DCFS area has recruiters who assist in the recruitment process, and foster home evaluators who conduct the in-home consultation visit and ensure the family completes the approval process. These evaluators can be contracted or designated staff. The Statewide Assessment notes that each DCFS area develops an annual recruitment plan to be initiated at the beginning of each fiscal year, and the Family Foster Home Needs Assessment, which is conducted at least once a year, is used in developing the plan. The plan also outlines ongoing recruitment efforts for DCFS.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, prospective foster parents can log on to the State of Arkansas/DCFS/Foster Families website and make an inquiry. Notification of Internet inquiries made by prospective foster parents goes directly to the area manager. After a telephone inquiry received by staff or Internet inquiry made by a prospective foster parent, the designated staff person contacts the family within 3 working days. Initial contact will be via telephone, mail, or visit. The staff person will document contact on the DCFS Foster/Adopt Home Inquiry screen located on the DHHS internal website. After initial contact is made, the family is provided with an information packet. The packet must be sent to the family within 3 working days of the initial inquiry.

The Statewide Assessment reports that in focus sessions conducted as part of the assessment, field staff were asked to rate how effective DCFS is at recruiting foster and adoptive families. Forty percent of the staff indicated that the current foster and adoptive recruitment process is "somewhat effective," and 55 percent indicated the process is "rarely effective." Thirty percent of the adoption staff indicated the process is "somewhat effective," while 71 percent indicated it is "rarely effective."

The Statewide Assessment references a survey conducted with foster parents attending a DCFS conference. The survey indicated that foster parents believe DCFS should strive to retain existing foster parents rather than recruit new ones. Also, survey respondents suggested that DCFS conduct exit interviews with foster parents who leave to find out how their expectations have not been met.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that DCFS has begun to actively recruit Hispanic foster and adoptive parents. The assessment did not provide data on the racial makeup of children in foster care.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders across the sites commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR said there are a variety of recruitment activities; however, most also noted that recruitment activities are inconsistent across the State. Many stakeholders expressed the opinion that there are not enough foster homes, the quality of some of the homes is a concern, and foster homes do not receive the support required to maintain them as foster homes. In addition, some stakeholders expressed concerns regarding the difficulty in locating placements for children over age 13, especially males.

Stakeholders in St. Francis County and at the State level mentioned the Adoption Coalition, a faith-based, grassroots, community coalition that has 13 agencies across the State. According to stakeholders, the coalition has broadened awareness of the need for adoptive homes and children in need of homes. According to stakeholders, recruitment efforts through the coalition have been effective in finding homes for children. At least seven of the agencies have started their own Heart Gallery. The Heart Gallery has exhibits across the State and many are accessible via the Internet.

The recruitment effort mentioned most by stakeholders is Children of Arkansas Loved for a Lifetime (the CALL). Stakeholders noted that the CALL is being piloted in Pulaski County, although there are frequent inquiries from across the State. The CALL does Sunday morning recruitment at churches to make parishioners aware of the need for foster homes. The CALL presents a compact version of the PRIDE training to expedite the training and the approval process. Volunteers provide the training and complete the home studies; however, DCFS completes final approval of the homes. By the time of the Onsite Review, 10 months after the beginning of the initiative, 75 families were in various stages of the certification process and 40 churches had participated in the CALL. The initiative provides ongoing support and training. By all accounts, the CALL is having a positive impact on recruitment in Pulaski County. In addition, Pulaski County stakeholders noted that DCFS in Pulaski County participates in Wendy's Wonderful Kids.

Item 45. The State has in place a process for effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptions or permanent placements for waiting children

X **Strength** ___ **Area Needing Improvement**

Item 45 is rated as a Strength because, while the State acknowledges there may be barriers to placement outside the State such as delays in placement from the receiving State, DCFS has identified ICPC liaisons in each DCFS area and other tools such as the

website and photo listing book to help with recruitment and the approval process. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State's 2001 CFSR; therefore, Arkansas was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCFS uses the ICPC process when a child requires placement for foster care or a possible adoption outside the resident State. DCFS does not recruit homes out of State; however, it does identify possible placement resources and seeks approval. The assessment reports that the effectiveness of ICPC has been hampered in some cases by the inability to get a timely response from the field. The biggest issue is lack of staff and competing priorities in certain locations. DCFS has identified ICPC liaisons in each area and this has helped with getting more complete packets and more timely responses. DCFS is using its website and photo listing book as recruitment tools for foster and adoptive parents. The website is also connected to **AdoptUSKids** and referrals are received from families throughout the nation and other countries.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Several stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that children are placed in adoptive homes across jurisdictions, including in other States. They noted that adoptive resources in other counties or States are used by the State, including **AdoptUSKids**. Stakeholders in St. Francis County and at the State level reported that the Adoption Coalition, which has 13 agencies across the State, has broadened the awareness of the need for adoptive homes and children in need of homes. According to stakeholders, recruitment efforts through the coalition have been effective in finding homes for children. At least seven of the Adoption Coalition agencies have started their own Heart Gallery, which exhibit children free for adoption across the State and via the Internet.

Most stakeholders agreed that the ICPC presents a barrier in use of cross-jurisdictional resources for permanent placements because it slows the process considerably. Although DCFS has an ICPC processing system in place that includes an ICPC specialist in every DCFS area, the process is still time consuming.