



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

# **Child and Family Services Review Final Report**

**Georgia**

**July 2001**

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Region IV**

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FORM

**Purpose.** The purposes of this form include the following:

- To provide a preliminary assessment of the strengths and needs of the State's child and family services system prior to the onsite review, by analyzing information from the State's CFSP and Statewide Assessment on the form
  - To provide a format for each local review team to identify its collective findings based on the activities conducted by the team in a particular review site
  - To provide a format for recording information obtained during the onsite review applicable to the outcomes and systemic factors being reviewed, including information obtained from case reviews and stakeholder interviews
  - To provide a format for all the local review teams to consolidate their information into one comprehensive report to the State agency
  - When completed, following the onsite review, to serve as the final report of the review to the State agency that includes the summary of the review findings and the determination of substantial conformity
- **Organization.** The form includes sections for each of the three outcome areas and each of the seven systemic areas being reviewed. For each outcome listed, subsections are provided to record the number of cases reviewed by the team according to the degree to which the outcome was determined by the reviewers to be achieved, followed by a list of each indicator used to evaluate the outcome. For each systemic factor listed, subsections are provided to record the State's substantial conformity, or lack thereof, followed by the State plan requirements used to evaluate each systemic factor. The form also includes sections used to record areas determined by the review team to be operating in substantial conformity with applicable State plan requirements and those determined not to be in substantial conformity.
  - **Instructions.** Each review team member should receive a copy of the form that includes the preliminary assessment information. However, each local review team will submit only one completed form that includes the results of the local team's findings of the onsite review as compiled at the local team's final debriefing. The local team leader must ensure that the form is completed and submitted by the end of the onsite review. For each outcome (sections I–III), the team should record the number of cases they reviewed in which that particular outcome was determined to be substantially achieved, partially achieved or not being achieved or addressed by the agency under review. Each systemic factor (sections IV–X) should be marked by the team as substantially conforming to State plan requirements or not substantially conforming. Each performance indicator (items 1–45) following the outcomes and systemic factors should be judged by the team as primarily a strength or primarily an area needing improvement, recognizing there may be some identified strengths and needs within any one indicator. The basis for rating each performance indicator should be specific, should substantiate the rating, and should note the source of the information, i.e., case reviews stakeholder interviews, or the self-assessment. In the debriefing of the entire State review team near the conclusion of the onsite review, the team should complete one consolidated form that incorporates the findings of each local team and includes and addresses the information on the preliminary assessment. The team should complete the final two sections of the form (sections XI and XII), indicating those areas determined to be operating in substantial conformity with applicable requirements and those areas not in substantial conformity. The team will identify the specific performance indicators needing improvement in each area determined not to be in substantial conformity, to assist the State in developing its program improvement plan. Following the onsite review, the Regional Office review team leader will refine and supplement the form as needed, verify the areas of nonconformity, and submit the completed form to the State agency as the final report of the review.

**I. SAFETY**

<b>Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.</b>					
<b>Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:</b>					
<b>Total Cases Reviewed = 50      Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 48</b>					
	<b>Team 1</b>	<b>Team 2</b>	<b>Team 3</b>	<b>Total Number</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
Substantially Achieved:	20	11	12	43	90%
Partially Achieved:	1	2	0	3	6.2%
Not Achieved or Addressed:	2	0	0	2	4.1%
Not Applicable:	1	1	0	2	
<b>Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:</b>					
	<b>National Standard</b>	<b>State's Percentage</b>	<b>Meets Standard</b>	<b>Does Not Meet Standard</b>	
Repeat maltreatment	6.1%	4.22%*	X		
Maltreatment of children in foster care	0.57%	1.08%*		X	

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

  X   Strength             Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

\*These figures were obtained from the safety portion of the State's Data profile. Although, the State meets the standard in repeat maltreatment, the narrative portion of the statewide assessment reveals that available data cannot determine whether recurrence of maltreatment results from the same general circumstances or same perpetrator. This information will not be available until SACWIS is operable.

\*The State does not meet the standard for incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care. However, the State is addressing the issue to ensure the safety of children in foster and pre-adoptive placement by instituting a Special Investigation Unit, expanding the review of maltreatment in foster homes to include private foster homes, foster/adopt homes and adoptive homes and requiring CRS

investigation of any serious injury to a child, any unexplained or unanticipated death of child, any report of alleged perpetrator frequenting the home, any report of sexual abuse to a child victim by a child perpetrator, or any sexual activity.

### **Basis: Onsite Review**

#### **Strengths**

- Case record reviews and stakeholder interviews indicated an emphasis on safety that currently exists within the Georgia Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS). The tendency is to err on the side of risk prevention when circumstances are indecisive, even though this has resulted in the unintended consequence of increased numbers of children in care.
- Record reviews revealed improvement over the past several years in timely initiation of investigations, completing thorough and appropriate investigation documentation and in accomplishing face to face contacts with children.
- In 22 of the 25 cases reviewed (88%), timeliness of initiating investigations was shown as a strength.
- In almost all of the cases reviewed, investigations of reports of abuse and neglect were initiated timely, within the appropriate 24-hour or five-day response times stipulated by the State Agency (depending on the seriousness of the report).
- Appropriate priority levels were assigned to almost all of the investigations in the cases reviewed.
- In one of the smaller sites, a five-year grant on collaboration between the agency and law enforcement has resulted in a designated detective position to assist with investigations. Detectives attend the same training attended by DFACS workers.
- Stakeholders reported an emphasis on community partnerships in the campaign to keep children safe. Special note was made of the Community Child Protection Collaborative underway in four pilot sites. The pilots are modeled after the Jacksonville, Florida Community Partnership (funded by Edna McConnell Clark) that focuses on families in the community..

#### **Areas Needing Improvement**

- In one case, twenty-nine days elapsed before the worker made initial contact.
- One case involved a large family with six children which contributed to the worker's failure to interview all within the appropriate timeframes; this case also included an incident where a new report after the initial investigation was accepted as only new information.
- The agency deploys staff from other units to ensure timely response to reports which leads to periodic shortages within other units due to a shortage of qualified staff to cover caseloads.
- Stakeholders reported a lack of resources to attract and retain experienced staff impacts the agency's capacity to effectively utilize information gathered through family assessments.

- Case record review revealed that information gathered at time of initial assessment is sufficiently analyzed to provide services and supports to resolve immediate risk factors; however, lack of experienced staff as a result of significant turnover prevents thorough assessments and identification of underlying issues requiring attention.

## **Item 2. Repeat maltreatment**

  X   Strength           Area Needing Improvement

### **Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The State meets the standard in repeat maltreatment at 4.22%; the national standard is 6.1%. The narrative portion of the statewide assessment reveals that available data cannot determine whether recurrence of maltreatment results from the same general circumstances or same perpetrator. This information will not be available until SACWIS is operable.

### **Basis: Onsite Review**

#### **Strengths**

- Georgia met the national standard for repeat maltreatment.
- Forty-three of forty-seven (91.5%) cases reviewed noted strengths in the area of repeat maltreatment, indicating that there were no reports of repeat maltreatment during the period under review.
- Record review indicated the Agency's emphasis on protection and safety resulted in prompt removal of children from harmful environments, minimizing episodes of repeat maltreatment.
- Case record reviews indicated improvement in this area over the past several years.

#### **Area Needing Improvement**

- In one of the cases reviewed, maltreatment of a child in foster care was found due to medical neglect.
- Case record reviews revealed long histories of repeat maltreatment in some cases prior to the period under review.
- Case record review and stakeholders indicated that formalized procedures are needed to ensure better exchange of information and cooperation between counties. In transfer cases, it was revealed that receiving counties receive little case history information (actions taken and services provided) from previous county office. Delay was also noted when requesting assistance from a neighboring county for a placement home visit.

**Status of Safety Outcome S1 – Not in Substantial Conformity**

- 90% of the cases reviewed substantially achieved Safety Outcome S1. The statewide data indicators from the State Profile exceeded the national standards for repeat maltreatment, but did not meet the national standards for maltreatment of children in foster care.

<b>Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.</b>					
<b>Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:</b>					
<b>Total Cases reviewed = 50      Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 49</b>					
	<b>Team 1</b>	<b>Team 2</b>	<b>Team 3</b>	<b>Total Number</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
Substantially Achieved:	13	13	12	38	77.5%
Partially Achieved:	5	1	0	6	12.2%
Not Achieved or Addressed:	5	0	0	5	10.2%
Not Applicable:	1	0	0	1	

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

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

Georgia has very specific policy regarding removal of children from the home in that reasonable efforts should be made to prevent or eliminate the need for removal. Family Preservation Services, which have been available since 1990, are provided to families to reduce risk factors contributing to maltreatment and protect safety of children. Family Preservation programs offered by Georgia are: Prevention of Unnecessary Placement (PUP) services, Early intervention/Preventive Services (initiated in 2000), Parent Aide services and Homestead Services. These services are available statewide.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

- Interviews with parents and case reviews revealed that provision of home-based services such as Homestead and Parent Educator are effective in supporting families; a broad array of services including family counseling, parenting, home organization, alternate forms of child discipline and behavior modification techniques benefit parents and children and often prevent removal.
- Case record reviews indicated that in many instances, case managers arranged for unique services or resources based on individual family needs (PUP).

**Areas Needing Improvement**

- Stakeholders and case records indicated that mental health services, particularly public services, are not readily available to families.
- Record reviews revealed that in-home services provided did not adequately match or support family needs. In some instances, this resulted from lack of thorough assessment of family circumstances.

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

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

Family Preservation services have proven effective in reducing the risk of harm to the child. Some of the services are PUP, which reduce the risk factors contributing to child maltreatment and insure the protection and safety of children once a family has an open social services case. Parent Aide services are provided to help families by providing in-home and group parenting education with goals of insuring safety and protection of children by improving parenting competency. The Parent Aide works as a team member with the casework staff. Homestead services provide short-term, intensive, crisis-oriented, in-home counseling to families to stabilize the family and insure a safe healthy environment for the child and family.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

- In cases where children are born positive toxicology, efforts are made by case managers to either remove infants from homes and place with relatives or place in foster care.
- Case records revealed that in a number of cases, case managers recommended supervised visits in order to prevent harm to child(ren).
- Case records indicated that in situations where children were not in imminent danger, case managers were able to make adequate assessment of home situations and recommend appropriate services.

### **Area Needing Improvement**

- Stakeholders revealed workers are intimidated by the “open records law.” Anxiety around ‘making mistakes’ that will become known to the press impacts decisions around reducing risk of harm.
- Stakeholders expressed concerns about the safety of children in shelter care, particularly in the larger metropolitan area; security measures are not in place to prevent children and others from wandering in and out, medical needs are not met, and shelters are located in high-risk neighborhoods.
- Record reviews surfaced premature case closures particularly involving substance abuse and domestic violence. In these cases, assessment of risk beyond the immediate problem identified at the time of report was not conducted.

### **Status of Permanency Outcome S2 – Not in Substantial Conformity**

- 77.5% of the cases reviewed substantially achieved Safety Outcome S2.

## II. PERMANENCY

<b>Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.</b>					
<b>Total Cases Reviewed = 50    Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 28</b>					
<b>Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:</b>					
	<b>Team 1</b>	<b>Team 2</b>	<b>Team 3</b>	<b>Total Number</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
Substantially Achieved:	6	7	7	20	71.42%
Partially Achieved:	4	0	0	4	14.28%
Not Achieved or Addressed:	3	1	0	4	14.28%
Not Applicable:	11	6	5	22	
<b>Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:</b>					
	<b>National Standard</b>	<b>State's Percentage</b>	<b>Meets Standard</b>	<b>Does Not Meet Standard</b>	
Foster care re-entries	8.6%	4.43%**	X		
Length of time to achieve reunification	76.2%	63.01%**		X	
Length of time to achieve adoption	32%	23.05%**		X	
Stability of foster care placements	86.7%	92.29%**	X		
Length of stay in foster care*	N/A	N/A			

\*Not used to determine substantial conformity.

\*\*These figures were obtained from the Permanency Portion of the State Data Profile. Georgia meets the foster care re-entries indicators with 4.43%. The national data standard for this indicator is 8.6%.

\*\*The State did not meet the standard for the length of time to achieve reunification with 63.01% and the national standard is 76.2%.

\*\*Georgia did not meet the standard of the length of time to achieve adoption with 23.05% and the national standard is 32%.

\*\*The State meets the standard in stability of foster care placements with 92.29%. The national standard is 86.7%.

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

  X   Strength           Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The State meets the standard in this area and attributes their success to the reunification services (family-centered reunification services) provided to families statewide since 1990. These services include in-home support services, parent aide services, counseling, substance abuse treatment services and assistance with family concrete needs, such as, but not limited to rent and household goods to prevent re-entries into foster care.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

Out of the 50 cases reviewed, the total number of cases to which this indicator applies is 28. In 96.4% of the cases reviewed (27 cases), foster care re-entries were determined to be a strength in the following areas:

- In all the records reviewed in the three sites, most children did not have multiple entries into foster care. The reviewers' findings and interviews with stakeholders indicated that thorough assessment of children and families coming into care are credited to the agency policy of First Placement/Best Placement policy. This is a family based approach. It is a philosophy within the state that is built into practice and integrated to the extent that good assessments are done with children to ensure best matching based on child's specific needs. The staff participates in Regional Matching Meetings to find homes for children who are free for adoption.
- Stakeholders commend the efforts of front-end staff in implementing First Placement/Best Placement policy by providing thorough assessments of families and children coming into care. This policy is credited for the agency's low re-entry rate of children coming into foster care.

## Area Needing Improvement

The total number of cases with multiple re-entries during this review period is 1 (3.5%). The following were identified as needs improvement:

- Stakeholders emphasized the need to expand reunification services, pre-placement services and early intervention services to prevent placements.
- A need to increase pool of placement resources was noted by stakeholders who reported that limited resources are sometimes used inappropriately, in cases of children with severe emotional problems.

## Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

  X   Strength           Area Needing Improvement

### Basis: Statewide Assessment

The State meets this standard and attributes this to the implementation of First Placement/Best Placement assessments in 1999. These assessments resulted in more thorough information for DHR staff, courts and other stakeholders to make appropriate placements and permanency decisions. In addition, therapeutic resources, better training and support for caretakers has had a great impact on the stability of foster care placements.

### Basis: Onsite Review

### Strengths

This indicator was cited as a strength in nineteen of the twenty-seven applicable cases (70.3%). Reviewers noted the following strengths:

- There were indications from some of the records reviewed that there were stable foster care placements for several years' duration. In one county, reviewers noted three cases of children that were placed from hospital into stable pre-adoptive homes.
- In one review site, the stability of foster care placement indicator was cited as a strength in all applicable records reviewed, while in another site, six out of eight records reviewed were cited as strengths.
- Stakeholders commend workers for thorough assessments and the use of outside providers in conducting assessments and making determination of appropriate needs and services.

## Area Needing Improvement

The total number of cases to which this indicator applies is 27. In 29.6 percent of cases reviewed (8), the stability of foster care placement was found to be an area needing improvement. The following were identified as the major reasons for placement disruptions:

- Lack of availability of homes for sexually abused children and children with emotional/behavioral issues were identified in some of the records reviewed.
- In some of the records reviewed, reviewers noted that use of shelter care placement creates an automatic move, even for newborn and young children.
- There were indications that children with multiple serious needs that require intensive services were left with no adequate supporting services to support them, and in some cases, workers provided referral services after it was requested by foster parents.
- Stakeholder expressed need for resources in Kinship care and services to support placement. They also emphasized the need for more workers and financial support to implement these programs.

A data discrepancy occurred in the performance indicator, Stability of Foster Care Placements. The National Standard is 86.7%. Georgia's percentage for this indicator was 92.29%. Of the 27 applicable cases reviewed onsite, stability of foster care placements is rated as an area needing improvement (70.3%). In order to resolve this discrepancy, the State would have had to submit current data to show that the rate of stability of foster care placements now meets the national standard of 86.7%. ACF Regional office informed the State of this discrepancy. The Georgia Department of Human Resources informed ACF that Georgia accepts the indicator a not substantially achieved.

### Item 7. Permanency goal for child

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

#### Basis: Statewide Assessment

In Georgia, there has been slight change in the reunification/relative placement permanency goals from 1997-1999, with 67% for the point-in-time group and 90% of the first-time cohort group. Adoption as a permanency goal has increased for the point-in-time group from 16% in 1997 to 20% in 1999, while remaining nearly the same at 6% for the first-time cohort group. This increase is attributable to ASFA and State policy changes.

The percentage of children discharged to reunification/relative placement have remained nearly constant from 1997-1999 at 64% for the point-in-time group and 86% for the first time cohort group. Similarly, the percentage of children discharged to adoption has

remained nearly constant at 17% for the point-in-time group and 2% for the first-time cohort group. Children removed for the first time are inherently more likely to be reunified and less likely to be adopted within the cohort's six month observation time.

The median length of stay for children who were reunified or placed with relatives increased 35% from 3.94 months in 1997 to 5.32 in 1999. This increase is somewhat related to the large increase in the number of discharges from 1997 to 1999. The effort to discharge many children who had been in foster care for extended periods has had the side effect of increasing the median length of stay in 1999. Of course, the high rate of case manager turnover (44% annually) and attendant decrease in the level of experience (3.5 months, on average) are also likely causes for this increase in reunification times.

The 11% decrease in the median length of time to adoption (41 months in 1997 to 37 months in 1999) and the large increase in the number of children adopted (84% from 1997 to 1999) are indicative of Georgia's efforts and investments into the Office of Adoptions.

### **Basis: Onsite Review**

#### **Strengths**

In 71.4% of the applicable cases reviewed, the Permanency goal of child was cited as strengths in the following areas:

- In one of the review sites, most of the records reviewed established permanency goal for children in care. In this site, reviewers noted that adequate services were put in place to help children in care achieve permanency in a timely manner, and in some cases where reunification was not the goal, placement with relatives was achieved. Foster parents were either explored for adoption, or an alternative relative placement option was considered.
- Reviewers also noted that the agency pursued termination of parental rights within ASFA (Adoption and Safe Family Act) guidelines in some of the cases reviewed.

#### **Area Needing Improvement**

In 28.5% of the cases reviewed, the Permanency goal of child was determined to be an area needing improvement. The following were identified as the major reasons for placement disruptions:

- In some of the records reviewed, there were indications that adequate steps were not taken in a timely manner to achieve permanency goal.
- Interviews with stakeholders revealed that in some cases, workers wait for foster parents to request specific services before they were offered.

- Stakeholders reported that worker’s high caseload appears to contribute to lack of attention to permanency for children in stable placement.
- Stakeholder interviews revealed that there were instances when the establishment of reunification goal frequently continued past 15 of 22 months standard, and in some instances, that permanency goal of reunification was not reviewed until the 12-month hearing.
- Records reviewed also identified delays in filing TPR (Termination of Parental Rights) by workers in court, or documented the compelling reasons why TPR was not filed according to the stipulated guideline.
- Stakeholders expressed concern for children who are languishing in emergency shelter, and the safety of those children placed at the shelter.
- Other areas of concern mentioned by the stakeholders are frequency of staff turnover, high caseloads and the difficulties encountered by the agency in recruiting minority parents who are willing to provide permanency placement for minority children.

**Item 8. Independent living services**

  X   Strength             Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The Georgia ILP program continues to provide services for children in foster care 16-21. With the passage of CFCIP (Chaffee Foster Care Independent Living Program), that increased funding to include children 18-21 and housing, counseling, education, employment and other appropriate support services. However, there are three major areas that impact the agency’s ability to move older children into adoption or another permanent living arrangement. These factors are: staff turnover, juvenile court judges not complying with the new ASFA regulation and the new adoption assistance policy which prevents relatives from receiving adoption assistance unless the child has been in the custody of DHR, receiving SSI or previously received adoption assistance.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

There were no cases with a permanency goal of Independent Living in two of the sites reviewed. An independent living case was reviewed in one of the counties. This was seen as a strength. The following strengths were identified:

- Reviewers found a number of diverse ILP services that were available and provided to the youth.
- The IL specialist looks at non-traditional means of getting services. For example, the sample child reviewed had been signed up for a computer camp, upon completion of the camp; the child was given a computer of his own. The IL specialist takes into consideration the child’s abilities and interests in designing programs for the youth.
- Stakeholders spoke highly about the State Independent Living Program, which was attributed to the availability of Independent Living Program Coordinators in every region.

**Area Needing Improvement**

- There were no identified areas needing improvement.

**Item 9. Adoption**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

State did not meet the standard in this area but has made major strides in adoption planning and placement following a change in State law in 1996 which created the Office of Adoption and Bill 611 which addressed timely TPR’s (Termination of Parental Rights). The Office of Adoption was formalized in January 1997. The mission of the Office is to develop and implement an efficient, outcome based, quality, special needs adoptions program that would eliminate and facilitate the elimination of barriers to adoption in the State system. The goals and objectives are centered on reducing the length of stay in foster care and moving children into adoption in a timely manner.

The goals to support this objective are:

1. Privatization of service provision areas where appropriate and cost effective.
2. Private sector involvement that actively seeks assistance from sources outside state government to support innovative approaches that increase and support adoptive families.
3. Adoption policy revised to streamline the process and speed up placements.
4. Development of innovative ways to recruit adoptive families.
5. Development of post adoption services through network of community-based resources.

As a result of these goals and objectives, the number of finalized adoptions increased by 32% from 1997-1999. Georgia was one of 35 states to receive the first Adoption incentive award. The number of foster parent adoptions rose from 71% in 1997 to 84% in 1999. However, staff turnover is a problem in completing the detailed work of adoption.

### **Basis: Onsite Review**

#### **Strengths**

This indicator was rated as a strength in seven of the thirteen applicable records (53.8%). The following strengths were identified:

- In one site, the agency moved timely to achieve adoption goal, in most of the reviewed cases. In another site, the children were moved quickly into the adoption process in two of the three cases reviewed. Reviewers found that the workers had identified adoption as a goal without waiting for the child to be in care for 15 of 22 months, as required by ASFA (Adoption and Safe Families Act).
- Records reviewed indicated that the agency makes effective use of Foster/Adoptive homes. At one site, it was noted that excellent partnerships with foster parents, CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) and GAL (Guardian Ad Litem) contributed to achieving adoption goals in this area.
- Interviews with Stakeholders revealed that the recently passed State law which provided at least one Juvenile Court Judge in each circuit has helped move cases through the system more quickly.

## **Area Needing Improvement**

Adoption was rated as an area needing improvement in six of the thirteen applicable records. The following areas were identified as needing improvement:

- In one site, reviewers identified lengthy time periods to initiate TPR (Termination of Parental Rights), finalizing adoption and lack of adequate attention given to children in stable placements.
- Stakeholders commented on the overbooked court calendars and its impact on the work of the Special Assistant Attorney General's (SAAG'S) in adoption proceedings.
- Stakeholders noted that in some situations, foster parents do not know which services/options are available to them if they adopt.

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

Strength  Area Needing Improvement

#### **Basis: Statewide Assessment**

Currently 79% of Georgia's children in care are placed in family foster care, 19% of those are placed with relatives. In May 2001, the Georgia Relative Care subsidy was implemented which is likely to increase the number of children placed permanently in relative care settings.

The subsidy will be paid with TANF redirect funds. In 1998, a law was passed that empowered the juvenile court judges to award permanent custody of children under the court's protection to a relative until age 18, with a three-year review of the child and family by the juvenile court.

## **Basis: Onsite Review**

### **Strengths**

This indicator was rated a strength in two of the five records reviewed. The following strengths were identified:

- In some of the cases reviewed, it was noted that the goal of other planned permanent living arrangements was used appropriately, through the provision of extensive services relating to goals and regular reviews of service plan.
- There were indications that case planning meetings enabled the workers to monitor the progress of service recipients.

### **Area Needing Improvement**

In three out of five cases reviewed, this indicator was rated as an area that needs improvement. Reviewers identified the following barriers to achieving other planned permanent living arrangements for some of the children in foster care:

- In one county, stakeholders emphasized the need for other placement resources, such as, guardianship, long term foster care by agreement and emancipation.
- In another county, stakeholders expressed concern about case plans that are not developed with recognition of serious underlying problems that drive certain behaviors. They emphasized the need for other placement resources, such as: legal guardianship of children who are 12 years or older, that do not want to be adopted.

### **Status of Permanency Outcome P1 – Not in Substantial Conformity**

- 71.4% of the cases reviewed substantially achieved Permanency Outcome P1. The statewide data indicators from the State Profile exceeded the national standards for foster care re-entries and stability of foster care placement, but did not meet the national standards for length of time to achieve reunification and length of time to achieve adoption.

<b>Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.</b>					
<b>Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:</b>					
<b>Total Cases Reviewed = 50    Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 28</b>					
	<b>Team 1</b>	<b>Team 2</b>	<b>Team 3</b>	<b>Total Number</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
Substantially Achieved:	7	7	7	21	75%
Partially Achieved:	6	1	0	7	25%
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	0	0	
Not Applicable:	11	6	5	22	

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

X Strength    \_\_\_ Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

This indicator was rated as a strength in twenty-four of the twenty-six applicable records reviewed (92.3%). The following strengths were identified:

- In most of the cases reviewed, placement was made within the same county and school system in collaboration with the education department, whenever possible and appropriate.
- Records reviewed indicated that efforts to maintain continuity with school participation were good. Reviewers found that most placements outside the child’s community were based on the best interests of the child.
- Stakeholders gave credit to the agency’s willingness to collaborate with other service providers.

**Area Needing Improvement**

In 7.6 percent of the cases reviewed, proximity of foster care placements was rated as an area needing improvement. The following needs were identified:

- In one review site, lack of transportation in the large metropolitan area was identified as a barrier to parents being able to visit their children placed outside their communities.
- Stakeholders commented on the need to increase the pool of foster parents, in order to place children and siblings in closer proximity to their families and communities, and help them connect with the best available adults to care for and love them.

**Item 12. Placement with siblings**

Strength      Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

This indicator was rated as a strength in 72.2 % of the applicable cases reviewed. The following strengths were identified:

- In one site, cases reviewed revealed concerted efforts to place siblings together. In one case, the sample child was initially placed with his siblings at the time of their removal; due to this child’s behaviors, he was placed in a treatment group home. While he was in the group home, his siblings were adopted. When he was ready to be released from the group home, he was placed in the same home in which his siblings had been adopted five years earlier. This is one example of efforts to place siblings together if possible.
- The reviewers noted that in cases where siblings were separated, there was thoughtful up-front assessments by the workers.

**Area Needing Improvement**

In 27.7% of the cases reviewed, reviewers noted the following areas needing improvement:

- There were indications in some of the records reviewed that emphasis was placed on locating placement, rather than placing siblings together.
- Reviewers noted that in some cases, there was no documentation that adequate efforts were made to place children in the same home.
- Stakeholders commented on the need to support foster parents with adequate training that equips them with the tools needed to provide care for children with special needs and behavioral problems.
- In another site, stakeholders emphasized the need to recruit more foster parents who can accommodate large sibling groups.

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

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

### **Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The Placement Supervisory Review Guide and the Evaluation and Reporting Guide provide the internal mechanisms to monitor the frequency of case manager-child contacts in accordance with the required standards. Contacts between the case manager and the parent are documented in the case plan, including type, frequency, nature of contacts and the service needs of each child. The Foster Care Manual provided the contact standards for each placement case type.

### **Basis: Onsite Review**

#### **Strengths**

In 66.6% of the cases reviewed, this indicator was rated as a strength. The following strengths were identified:

- In one review site, records reviewed indicated that emphasis was placed on sibling/parent visits.
- In another site, reviewers found that the agency supported and encouraged sibling's visits appropriately. It was noted that, in some cases, workers go the extra mile to ensure consideration of special family needs and circumstances.
- Stakeholders comment on the positive impact visitation centers had on siblings/parents visits.

#### **Areas Needing Improvement**

This indicator was rated as needing improvement in 33.3% of the cases reviewed. The following were noted as needing improvement:

- In one site, 3 out of 5 applicable cases reviewed identified lack of contacts between parents and siblings in foster care.
- Reviewers noted that most visits take place in the office, without documentation as to the reasons why other alternative visiting arrangements were not made, or efforts made to be flexible in arranging visits outside the agency.
- In another site, stakeholders reported that excessive high number of caseloads and staff turnover affect the ability of workers to schedule adequate visits with parents and siblings in foster care.

### **Item 14. Preserving connections**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

In 89.2% of the applicable cases reviewed, the agency was found to be preserving family connections. The following strengths were identified:

- In two sites, all but one of the records reviewed was rated as strengths. Reviewers found that workers were very conscientious about preserving connections, whether it was through providing parent/child/sibling visits or placing the child in his/her home or community.
- In another site, all placements with relatives supported connections in most cases, and primary connections of the child to his/her neighborhood, school, community, family and friends were maintained.
- It was indicated in some of the cases reviewed that information about the child’s origin was preserved through the availability of a “life book” with pictures of the family of origin and other important information in their lives.

**Areas Needing Improvement**

This indicator was rated as needing improvement in 10.7% of the cases reviewed. The following areas were identified as needing improvement:

- Reviewers noted that in some cases, visits by other available family members were not fully encouraged.
- In one site, reviewers noted that relative placements were not fully explored in some of the records reviewed.

**Item 15. Relative placement**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

In 1997 in the point in time profile, 23.4% of the children were in relative care. In 1998 and 1999, it decreased to 18.6%. In the cohort group in 1997, relative placement was 20.9%. It decreased to 18.1% in 1998 and increased slightly to 19.2% in 1999. There was not a significant difference in the Cohort Group and the Point in Time group. However, the implementation of the Georgia

Relative Care Subsidy in May 2001 will likely increase the number of children placed permanently in relative care settings. The subsidy will be paid with TANF funds.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

In 100 percent of the cases reviewed, this indicator was rated as strength. The following strengths were identified:

- Record reviewed indicated that all required relative placements were explored and evaluated before children were placed in their homes.
- Reviewers' interviews with staff and supervisors revealed that relative placements were preferred if the children could be safely maintained in their homes.
- It was indicated that in cases where relative placements actually occurred, contacts with extended family assisted in making final decisions for children.
- There were indications that interstate compact home studies were initiated and conducted in applicable cases.

**Area Needing Improvement**

- There were no identified areas needing improvement.

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

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

In 80% of the applicable cases reviewed, the relationship of child in care with parents was maintained by the agency. These are the identifiable strengths:

- In one of the review sites, there were indications that workers provided adequate visitation between children in care and their parents in order to maintain good parent child relationships.

- In all three sites, reviewers noted that strong agency efforts were made to facilitate visits/relationships, even if biological parents refused to cooperate.
- In cases where the goal was not reunification, there were indications that efforts were made to maintain the ties between the parents and their children.
- Reviewers also noted that agency efforts to encourage visitation have had a positive impact on the relationship of children in care with their parents.

### **Area Needing Improvement**

This indicator was rated as needing improvement in 20% of the cases reviewed. Below are identified needs:

- Reviewers found that more appropriate contacts, such as telephone or visits are lacking between the children in care and their biological parent in cases where the parents were either incarcerated, or in residential treatment facilities.
- Interviews with stakeholders revealed the need for more efforts to maintain stronger relationships between teenagers and mothers.
- In one review site, there were indications that efforts to allow new born babies and mother's visits/bonding and communications about baby's development, needs improvement.
- Stakeholders indicated in one of the review sites, that transportation problem, high rate of caseload and staff turnover have impacted on the ability of workers to arrange required visits between children in foster care and their parents.

### **Status of Permanency Outcome P2 – Not in Substantial Conformity**

- 75% of the cases reviewed were rated substantially achieved for Permanency Outcome P2.

### III. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

<b>Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.</b>					
<b>Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:</b>					
<b>Total Cases Reviewed = 50      Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 50</b>					
	<b>Team 1</b>	<b>Team 2</b>	<b>Team 3</b>	<b>Total Number</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
Substantially Achieved:	14	11	11	36	72%
Partially Achieved:	4	3	1	8	16%
Not Achieved or Addressed:	6	0	0	6	12%
Not Applicable:	0	0	0	0	

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

\_\_\_ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

#### **Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The Standards for Comprehensive Child and Family Assessments is the form used for First Placement/Best Placement to assess educational, health and psychological needs.

#### **Basis: Onsite Review**

#### **Strengths**

- In the two smaller sites, there was evidence of strong early assessments and individualized services based on needs. Specialty assessments are conducted timely, such as psychological, and good quality assessments result in appropriate services.
- In two sites, there was good usage of PUP and Homestead services as well as good collaboration among agencies in the cases reviewed, including CASA, GAL’s, Pathways, Homestead, Parent Educators, Education, etc. Stakeholders indicated that the DFCS staff is extremely committed to children and frequently go the extra mile to see that children receive services needed to meet their needs.
- In all three sites, Homestead brings flexibility to the process; family group conferencing, when used, is successful.

- In the largest site there were some examples of case managers going to extraordinary measures to provide services, working collaboratively with other partners and looking for funding for services.
- In all three sites, where available, First Placement/Best Placement provides very thorough assessments, and Homestead provides individualized and flexible services.
- At the state level, stakeholders reported good collaboration with over 100 local agency teams statewide plus a state level team where private and public sector agencies and families come together to staff cases and look at local resources.
- Stakeholders also reported good collaboration in the Family Connection Initiative currently in 151 out of the state's 159 counties.

### **Areas Needing Improvement**

- In all three sites, there are issues around provision of appropriate services for needs related to mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence. In one of the smaller sites, mental health needs are not properly addressed due to the lack of available services in the community. In another site, services to foster parents are not always intensive enough to prevent disruptions.
- In the larger site, there are concerns about the lack of up-front comprehensive assessments. Although First Placement/Best Placement, where available, does good assessments, these assessments are not ongoing. There is more assessment on risk, but not as much assessment on mental health, health and education.
- In the larger site, there are more standardized services, rather than individualized. For instance, there were situations where anger management services were provided, but not the needed substance abuse services. There is a need to focus more on what the families and children need, and not just focus on what services are available, not just parenting classes, anger management, etc. There is concern that case managers and even supervisors do not always know what services **are** available.
- Also in the larger site, there is concern about the lack of follow through when assessments are done and the duration of services, especially in substance abuse cases. There are also concerns about cases being closed too soon prior to completion of appropriate services. Internally, there is an issue related to children and families' needs being met during the time of transfer of cases from the CPS investigation unit to the placement unit. In many instances there are several weeks to months before a new case manager is assigned while needs of the children and families go unmet.
- In the larger site, foster parents have difficulty in reaching case managers, leaving them feeling unsupported.

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

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The State and Georgia laws promote the involvement and participation of parents of children in foster care in the development of the case plan. Parents receive written notice (at least five days in advance) of the meeting to develop the case plan. The law also requires that any recommendations of the parent be included in the case plan when submitted to the court for review. As part of the Judicial Review Report, the county must include: the parent's receipt of advance written notice, the extent of parental participation and the parent's agreed upon obligations or why the parent does not concur. The parent's lack of participation and/or availability in the case planning process must be documented.

### **Basis: Onsite Review**

#### **Strengths**

- In the two smaller sites, for the majority of cases reviewed, reviewers found involvement by families in case planning, and families knew what was in their case plans. Parents stated that services they wanted were added to plans. Case plans were very specific to each case and addressed the reasons that brought them to the attention of DFCS.
- In the larger site, there were some examples of parents and children knowing what they needed to do to complete their case plan. Where parents reached out to the agency, there was more involvement in case planning, but they were not consistently involved if they did not request such involvement.

#### **Areas Needing Improvement**

- Although in the smaller sites, reviewers found involvement by families in case planning in the majority of cases reviewed, it was not consistent, as there were instances where case planning was done without the families' input.
- In the larger site, the practice does not reflect ongoing family involvement in case planning, and this is one of the greatest areas needing improvement. There was a general lack of active involvement by children and families in most cases, with some examples of older children not involved in case planning at all and not knowing why they were even involved with DFCS. Typically, case managers developed case plans and presented them to parents. There was a lack of attention to fathers in particular in case planning. Parents were more likely to be involved in case planning in foster care cases than in CPS cases. In many cases the agency waited for parents to ask for help rather than the agency reaching out to them. There was no ongoing identification of improving strengths, continuing needs and services to be provided.
- Family group conferencing was not clearly reflected in the cases reviewed.
- First Placement/Best Placement involves parents, but there needs to be an ongoing assessment with parents' involvement.

#### **Item 19. Worker visits with child**

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

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The Foster Care Manual provides guidance on the frequency of worker visits with the child. However, due to high staff turnover some counties have difficulty meeting the required contact standards. At the local level the Placement Supervisory Review Guide and the Evaluation and Reporting Guide provide the mechanisms to monitor the frequency of case manager – child contacts in accordance with the required standards. The contact standards were revised in 2000 to enhance communication with the family and to strengthen the Division’s monitoring of the child’s safety in out-of-home care.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

- In the two smaller sites, visitation is a real strength and makes services more effective. Visits are more frequent than required, and there is real substance to the visits. Case managers address case plans and progress towards achievement of the goals when visiting children. The experienced case manager staff and lower caseloads were recognized as contributing to this strength.
- In the larger site, monthly contacts are usually made, but the high caseloads prevent case managers from visiting as often as they feel is needed.

**Areas Needing Improvement**

- In the larger site, excessively large caseloads have a major negative effect on case managers’ ability to maintain appropriate contact. Reviewers found that there is a need to make the contacts with children more meaningful and more individualized to the cases. Reviewers also found that visits are not consistently held in the least restrictive environments possible according to state policy.
- DFCS policy does not require as frequent contacts if a contract agency is involved in a case, and in some cases the contract agency workers are doing the visits. In these cases the state’s policy requirement is to have the number of face-to-face contacts with the DFCS Services Worker that is negotiated with the agency to meet the child’s needs, but the minimum is only three times each year. Policy only requires Services Workers to have one face-to-face contact every three months with a child in long-term foster care; only two face-to-face contacts each year for a child in institutional foster care; and only two contacts for a child in a public or private residential treatment center in Georgia. No face-to-face contact is required for a child placed in any setting outside of Georgia, except in residential treatment facilities, with certain qualifications. These policies need to be

strengthened to comply with the language and intent of ASFA and Section 475 (5) (A) (ii), as well as good social work practice.

**Item 20. Worker visits with parents**

\_\_\_ Strength     X Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The Foster Care Manual provides guidance on the frequency of worker visits with parents. The contact standards were revised in 2000 to enhance communication with the family. However, due to high staff turnover, some counties have difficulty meeting the required contact standards. Contacts between the case manager and the parent are documented in the case plan, including the type, frequency and nature of contacts.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

- In the smaller sites, case managers maintain consistent contact. Visits are frequent, and there is real substance to the visits. Case records documented that the case managers discussed case plans with parents and their progress toward the stated goals when visiting the family. Interviews with parents revealed the parents were well aware of the requirements in the case plans. In addition to visits, case managers are readily available to parents. Again, the experienced case manager staff and lower caseloads were recognized as contributing to this strength.
- In the larger site, monthly contacts are usually made.

**Areas Needing Improvement**

- In the larger site, excessively large caseloads have a major negative effect on case managers' ability to maintain appropriate contact. Case managers' caseloads are unreasonably high and do not permit them to maintain appropriate visits with families and carry out all their other responsibilities. There is also a need to make the contacts with parents more meaningful and individualized to the cases. There is too often a lack of purpose in visits, not planned for or thought out.
- State policy does not contain specific frequency requirements for visitation with parents.

<b>Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.</b>					
<b>Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:</b>					
<b>Total Cases Reviewed = 50      Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 33</b>					
	<b>Team 1</b>	<b>Team 2</b>	<b>Team 3</b>	<b>Total Number</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
Substantially Achieved:	12	8	5	25	75.7%
Partially Achieved:	1	2	1	4	12.1%
Not Achieved or Addressed:	3	0	1	4	12.1%
Not Applicable:	8	4	5	17	

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

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The State does not have the data available regarding the educational needs of children in its care. However, the case manager and family must address a child’s educational needs in the case plan whenever this is identified as a need in the family. The Education Evaluation portion of the Comprehensive Assessment includes a copy of any school records within the last school year, a brief summary statement on the child’s current functioning in the current grade level and any other significant issues and the completion of a three page educational form.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

- In the two smaller sites there is mostly timely assessment and follow through on services to meet children’s educational needs. There is good collaboration between DFCS and Education. Stakeholders reported good working relationships between schools and DFCS. There were examples in the cases reviewed where the school social worker teamed with DFCS to assess risk and monitor difficult cases. In some cases school placements were made purposefully with specific teachers that resulted in children getting on task educationally. There is an excellent example of a successful collaborative for mentors in schools

established through the Sony Corporation where employees are involved with and provide funding for children, even for extracurricular activities. They visit the children in their homes, provide respite, etc. The mentors provide stability for the children, some staying involved with the same child for four to six years.

- In the larger site, there were some examples of DFCS attending IEP meetings and advocating for the needs of children in care. In some cases reviewed, children had educational success due to direct involvement of DFCS or foster parents, or parents attending to needs. The most successful cases were where the schools and parents were already addressing educational issues with DFCS monitoring, although DFCS may not have initiated the activity.
- At the state level, stakeholders reported that the Family Connection is an effective collaborative established in 151 counties. The collaborative involves schools, Health and DFCS to focus on specific children's needs.
- A great strength is that the State provides a college education through state universities for youth in care, and there has been an increase in the number of youth graduating from high school and going to college.

#### **Areas Needing Improvement**

- In the smaller sites, there are some cases with delayed or no assessment or follow through on educational needs, and there is some improvement needed in follow up when cases are transferred out of the county.
- In the larger site, educational needs were not consistently addressed in case plans. There was a lack of up front educational assessment to identify educational needs. There is a need for early identification of developmental problems of children that later affect educational needs. Children experience multiple school placements. There is a need to go beyond seeing if children are on grade level to identify other problems in school.

- At the state level, stakeholders reported that children’s educational needs should be incorporated better in state plans, and that more advocacy is needed with the school system. However, it was reported that case managers do not always have the time to advocate for special educational services for children. There is an issue regarding children in group care. More work needs to be done with schools that indicate they don’t want these children in their schools. Education for children in group and residential care needs to improve, with education funding allocated for these children.

<b>Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.</b>					
<b>Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:</b>					
<b>Total Cases Reviewed = 50</b>		<b>Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 49</b>			
	<b>Team 1</b>	<b>Team 2</b>	<b>Team 3</b>	<b>Total Number</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
Substantially Achieved:	12	10	9	31	63.2%
Partially Achieved:	4	3	2	9	18.3%
Not Achieved or Addressed:	8	0	1	9	18.3%
Not Applicable:	0	1	0	1	

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

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The State does not have any data available to determine if children are being referred for a physical examination in a timely manner. However, case managers are required by policy to arrange appropriate and timely medical care for a child in care and for obtaining health related documents for the case record. As part of the comprehensive Child and Family Assessment, there is a Medical Evaluation Assessment that must be completed.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

- In the smaller sites, health issues were being addressed even though some of the children had multiple health care needs. Up front assessments occur routinely, and appointments are arranged timely to provide appropriate services, usually by private

providers. Medical records were in the files and given to foster parents. Health care issues were addressed in the in-home cases even when they were not issues of maltreatment. Health exams were received as required by policy. Children's immunizations were current. Case managers provide transportation for services even out of the county.

- In the larger site, there were some good examples of case managers attending to health needs, appointments and transportation, even with the extremely high caseloads. In addition, many parents in the cases reviewed were attending to the health needs of their children. Foster parents are particularly adept at attending to the health needs of children in their care.
- At the state level, stakeholders reported that the state has capacity for health coverage for all children through Peachcare and Medicaid, and the state is making diligent efforts to get children enrolled in Peachcare. There is a strong partnership between DFCS and the Division of Community Health. The state is increasing the number of children having health screening as they come into care.

### **Areas Needing Improvement**

- In the smaller sites, following assessments, ongoing services are a problem, particularly for dental needs, due to a lack of Medicaid dental resources.
- Follow up does not always occur by case managers to learn results of medical or other appointments.
- In the larger site, there are concerns that children's health issues are not always addressed for some obvious specific health problems.
- Even though there were some examples of case managers attending to health needs, reviewers did not find this to be consistent, with some examples of staff not providing the support needed.
- At the state level, even though the state has capacity for health coverage for all children through Peachcare and Medicaid, the challenge is getting those children connected with this valuable resource. There is also an issue with obtaining the health option for youth over age 18.
- There is a lack of provider resources in rural areas of the state, so accessibility of services and lack of transportation in rural areas are serious issues.

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

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

#### **Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The State does not have any data available to determine if mental health screenings are being completed. As part of the Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment, there is a Psychological Evaluation that must be completed on all children age four or

over. As part of the case planning with the family, the case manager and family must address a child's mental health care needs in the case plan whenever this is identified as a need in the family.

If a child does not have the Comprehensive Youth and Family Assessment completed as they enter care, case managers are required to have a psychological evaluation with a written report completed within 180 calendar days of the date of removal for children ages six years or older who have not had an evaluation within the past six months.

Case Managers are required by State policy to arrange appropriate and timely care for a child if mental health is an identified need.

### **Basis: Onsite Review**

#### **Strengths**

- In the two smaller sites, DFCS staff makes use of First Placement/Best Placement services to assess the children's mental health needs. Generally, good assessments are done, and some treatment is available from private providers, as no public providers are available.
- In the larger site, reviewers found examples of foster parents attending to mental health needs of children in their care. There were some examples of good assessments and some foster parents and case managers going to great lengths to obtain services.
- Stakeholders reported a good resource, although limited to only about 200 cases, in CHAMPS, a program for more severely mentally disturbed children. CHAMPS is used as a resource when DFCS needs more extensive services.
- At the state level, DFCS is working with the Department of Mental Health to improve access for children in state custody. Intensive family intervention services were just added under Medicaid mental health services. Mental health now has non-residential services.
- Stakeholders reported good collaboration with over 100 local agency teams statewide plus a state level team where private and public sector agencies and families come together to staff cases and look at local resources.

#### **Areas Needing Improvement**

- In the two smaller sites, although DFCS staff makes use of First Placement/Best Placement services to assess the children's mental health needs, in some cases treatment is not always provided due to some lack of services. Some assessments in the cases reviewed indicated that the children had mental health issues, but no services were provided to meet those needs.
- Turnover of Mental Health staff was identified as an issue in one site.
- In the other site, changes in placement and worker in one case resulted in mental health services not following the child, resulting in the child not receiving follow-up as required. In addition, transfer of cases to other counties resulted in interruption in treatment.

- In one site, there are long waiting lists for mental health services. Low cost services for families outside of foster care are not readily available.
- In the larger site, the review identified concerns regarding mental health needs of children. Record reviews surfaced a lack of routine assessment of mental health needs. The assessments in the case records reviewed did not address underlying issues affecting victims of child abuse and neglect and loss issues were not addressed.
- Case record review indicated lack of follow through on needed mental health services even when assessments are completed. Some arrangements are made purely as a requirement of admitting children to residential facilities.
- At the state level, stakeholders reported that mental health is a big challenge. There is a particular need to improve early intervention. There are issues in service array and availability.
- Stakeholders reported that services are mostly not available in rural areas. Although the state has increased resources for mental health over the past ten years, there remains the challenge of barriers to accessing services and the system remaining way under capacity.
- Stakeholders emphasized the need for statewide up-front preventive services and services at the community level for Juvenile Justice youth coming into the child welfare system.

**V. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM**

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

**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.**

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The State does not have an operational statewide information system. Georgia is in the process of planning and developing a statewide automated child welfare information system (SACWIS). However, the State’s current systems are adequate to meet federal and state reporting need by determining status, demographics, location and goals for all children in foster care. Data are input at the local county level and is immediately accessible to case managers, supervisors and administrators. County staff have access to client history across county lines and have a menu of data reports regarding their own county data. Field management and state level staff have the ability to access statewide reports and information.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

- Stakeholders reported that IDS (Internal Data System) is designed to capture the required elements.
- The DFCS staff reported that they could look up cases and get key information such as demographic information about clients.
- DFCS staff in one county stated that the system provides the staff with some reports such as caseload listings and notices when case plans are due. It is useful to determine if a client has received services in other counties in the State. The staff can also use the TANF system to determine if a client is receiving those services, although there is no interface between the systems.

- Stakeholders reported that a SACWIS IAPD was submitted to ACYF's (Administration for Children Youth and Families), Children's Bureau and has received conditional approval.
- Stakeholders reported that the State has automated its case plan so that the court also can have access to it.

### **Areas Needing Improvement**

- Stakeholders reported that IDS is difficult to use, therefore, some counties do not input data. As a result, the data are inconsistent and unreliable.
- Stakeholders complained that supervisors and caseworkers cannot always rely on the data in the system. This particularly involves data regarding the status of children in foster care. Therefore, supervisors track children's data manually.
- Stakeholders reported that managers and supervisors are not always able to use or interpret the data in the system
- DFCS staff reported in one of the smaller counties that a tracking system of inter-county transfers and case histories and services would be helpful for caseworkers and supervisors.

**V. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM**

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

**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

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The State has a standardized case plan which is designed to comply with both federal and state requirements. Case plans must be developed and submitted to the court for review and approval and is subsequently incorporated into the order of the court to strengthen enforcement and accountability. Georgia’s case plan documents include: the 30-day case plan, the case review, and the written transitional living plan (used for youth 16 and older). The Placement Evaluation and Reporting Review Guide and the Supervisory Review Guide monitor the effectiveness and timeliness of case plan development. Georgia has piloted the Case Plan Reporting System to enhance compliance and effectiveness of case planning. The web-based document is currently a pilot in 15 counties involving DFCS managers and juvenile court judges.

**Basis: On site Review**

**Strengths**

- At each review site, there were examples of families and children involved in the development and implementation of the written case plan.
- In an effort to increase family participation for those children entering out-of-home care, Georgia is implementing Family Group Conferencing. Progress in meeting the goals of the case plan was noted in several cases where the family and children fully participated.

- The Family Group Conferencing is an excellent model to increase family participation. Providing support to families such as transportation and flexible times and sites will also promote participation in the case planning process.
- In one of the smaller counties, case plans were specific to the individual cases, addressing the individual needs of the parents and children and specifying services to meet the individual needs.

**Area Needing Improvement**

- In the larger county, case record reviews indicated a little involvement of parents and children in the development of the case plan.
- Stakeholders indicated that case plans are developed solely by the case manager and presented to the family for signature and concurrence.
- Case managers view the process of Family Group Conferencing as a one-time occurrence rather than an ongoing process of the continuous evaluation with the family on the progress of achieving the goals of the case plan.
- Stakeholders also identified the need to increase the participation of fathers in the case planning process.
- Another stakeholder concern is the need to strengthen collaboration with the Citizen Review Boards and CASA to enable a joint focus in achieving goals of the case plan.
- In the larger county, case record reviews revealed that some case plans had boilerplate language and similar services provided.

**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

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

Georgia law requires that the initial review of all children in care occur within 90 days of entering the dispositional order (incorporating the 30-Day Case Plan), but no later than six months following the child’s placement. Following the initial review, subsequent case reviews are held no less frequently than every six months. Interim reviews are scheduled, as requested, by the court or review panel. Georgia does not have the capability for monitoring the status of each child in foster care by the courts.

**Basis: On Site Review**

**Strengths**

- At each of the three sites, a review of case records indicated that six month reviews were held timely by the Citizen Review Boards and/or Administrative/Judicial review.

**Area Needing Improvement**

- Numerous stakeholders confirmed there continues to be issues of court continuances and court delays in meeting the requirement of a case review every six months.

**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

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

Statewide data regarding permanency hearings and their effectiveness are not available. The duration of temporary custody is 12 months from the child’s entry into care. Policy requires that a petition be filed 90-120 days prior to the expiration of the current order to ensure timeliness of the hearing. Monitoring is possible at the county department level through the use of the Placement Supervisory Guide and the Evaluation and Reporting Review Guide. Both instruments provide case managers and supervisory staff with information concerning timeliness of hearings, the identification of permanency plan in the court order and the reasonable efforts finding to finalize the permanency plan in effect.

The full implementation of the online case plan will provide greater uniformity concerning the permanency plan and agency efforts to achieve permanency as well as compelling reasons.

**Basis: On Site Review**

**Strengths**

- Case record reviews in all three sites revealed that permanency hearings are occurring no later than 12 months from the date the child entered care and no less frequently than 12 months thereafter.

### **Area needing improvement**

- Stakeholders reported some courts are conducting “motion-to-extend” rather than permanency hearings.
- Other stakeholder concerns were: court continuances and delays of the 12-month permanency hearing; courts not adequately addressing permanency at the 12-month permanency hearing; and the critical issues of permanency and reunification were not being seriously addressed in some judicial proceedings.

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

  X   Strength             Area Needing Improvement

#### **Basis: Statewide Assessment**

Georgia has implemented TPR provisions to “current foster children” within ASFA’s specified timeframes. Georgia has an 18-month phase in approach to implementing ASFA. The method used by the State to apply Section 475(5)(E) to current foster children to meet ASFA requirements were that each county department office is required to:

1. Complete a desk review of all children in care on 7/1/98.
2. Review child characteristics, i.e., length of time in care, permanency plan, etc.
3. Identify subset priorities, i.e. children in care the longest, Adoption as the plan.
4. Initiate TPR proceedings, document relevant exception in an Addendum (attach to the case plan) and submit for next Judicial Review or Citizen Plan Review.
5. Sign Assurance Statement (Co-Director and Field Coordinator) that review, identification of priority children and action on behalf of current children completed prior to 1/1/99.
6. Submit documentation to State Office for State review.
7. State Office submitted documentation to Region IV HHS, ACF for approval.

A letter (dated February 16, 2000) acknowledging that all 159 county departments are in compliance with the transition rules is attached as supporting documentation. This letter verifies that the county departments have applied the transition rules for implementing the third and final phase of the termination of parental rights provision of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

#### **Basis: On Site Review**

## Strengths

- At each county site, record reviews and interviews with DFCS staff, attorneys and judges indicated knowledge of the ASFA provisions and an effort to comply.
- Case records and stakeholders indicated that there has been an increase of TPR's at the court.

## Area needing improvement

- DFCS staff indicated in one of the smaller counties that frequently the court would indicate that the parents are given more time to obtain services so that reunification can occur.
- Stakeholders noted numerous delays by the Special Assistant Attorney Generals (SAAGs) in the timely filing of petitions for termination of parental rights. Again, there are court delays in the hearing of petitions filed due to limited court docket time and the routine granting of continuances.

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

  X   Strength             Area Needing Improvement

## Basis: Statewide Assessment

There is no mechanism in place to track the notice requirements to foster parents, preadoptive parents and relatives. However, the Placement Supervisory Guide and the Evaluation Reporting Review Guide provide the only other monitoring beside the individual case record available at the county level. There are no uniform procedures in the State regarding the manner in which notifications for hearings are handled. Although State law requires notification for reviews and hearings, it does not prescribe how the notices are to be handled. Georgia needs to look at ways to ensure notices are handled consistently and in a manner where participation can be documented.

## Basis: On Site Review

## Strengths

- At all review sites, foster parents, preadoptive parents, and relative caregivers reported receiving notice of hearings and some were given an opportunity to be heard.

### **Areas Needing Improvement**

- Stakeholders expressed a need for foster parents, preadoptive parents, and relative caregivers to be better prepared to participate in the hearing.
- In the larger county, stakeholders reported inconsistency in the method of notification of hearings for foster parents, preadoptive parents, and relative caregivers. Some received a phone call, while others received written notification.
- In the larger county, foster parents felt that they were not well prepared to provide input at the court hearings.

**VI. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM**

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

**Item 30. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.**

  X   Strength         Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The quality assurance review process of social services began in 1991. In February 2000, the Evaluation and Reporting Section and Social Services Section in conjunction with the Consultation and Support Unit implemented the Child Safety Initiative in Fulton County. In April 2000, this initiative was expanded to other county departments.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

- Stakeholders reported that a system is in place for the Child Safety Initiative, Child Fatality Reviews and for Critical Injuries Reviews.
- DFCS staff in the larger county stated that licensing standards for foster family homes are in place and applied to all homes licensed by DFCS.
- Stakeholders indicated that there is a system in place to monitor contracted service providers.

**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.**

  X   Strength             Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The State developed a review process for social services programs to assess the management of DFCS service operation for the 159 county DFCS offices in 1991. The review process and accountability was expanded in February 2000 to include the Child Safety Initiative. The review process included extensive program evaluation by a team of experienced, professional staff. After the case record review, the review team discusses and analyzes findings and compiles a written report with recommendations. This report provides detailed information about the safety of children, a summary of the action taken, immediate attention cases, policy violations, case management standards, organizational and management issues. Each agency has a responsibility for developing a formal correction plan within 30 days.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

- Stakeholders reported that the case record reviews by State DFCS staff include 100% of all on-going Child Protective Service cases, active Foster Care cases, and active Foster Homes began February 2000. These reviews have been completed in 15 counties, including all urban ones in Georgia. The case record reviews of the mid-size counties in the State are expected to be completed by the end of the year. (The State may want to consider reducing the sample size in order to complete the reviews in a shorter period of time.)
- Stakeholders explained that counties must develop corrective action plans based on the findings of the case record reviews.
- DFCS staff reported that each county reviewed has its own quality assurance process in place. Monitoring of the quality of services in the two smaller counties is completed through the supervisory review of at least 2 cases for each worker each month.
- In addition, stakeholders reported that in one of the smaller counties, the supervisor holds group meetings on a weekly basis to discuss cases. Peer reviews of all cases are conducted at least yearly in which workers review each other's cases. Peer reviews are also completed on specific areas.
- In the larger county, the quality assurance staff does first and second level reviews of permanency cases and all cases of children and the emergency shelter.

- Stakeholders reported that the Consultation and Support Unit works with the counties in the development and monitoring of the corrective action plans.

### **Areas Needing Improvement**

- Stakeholders reported in the larger county that the case review process was negatively impacted when the quality assurance staff was deployed to handle the increased CPS workload. However, the staff was reinstated in the quality assurance unit on July 20, 2001.
- Stakeholders are concerned that DFCS is not sharing the quality assurance findings with partners outside the Department.
- Stakeholders reported that DFCS should develop a more proactive approach to negative media reports.
- There was not evidence that information obtained by the Evaluation and Reporting Unit is used to provide relevant reports and evaluation of program improvement measures implemented.

**VII. TRAINING**

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

**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.**

  X   Strength             Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

During the period under review, Georgia Academy provided required training courses for new employees. Currently, an RFP has been sent to vendors and the State anticipates an award to be made in early August 2001. There are six training modules each has a different topic of study. The modules are: Foundation of Child Welfare, Child Protective Services, Foster Care Services, Adoption Services, Domestic Violence Training and Supervisors on the Front Line.

Although there is not a minimum hour requirement for in service training of workers, nine weeks of training are provided to new social services employees. The training for new supervisors is Basic Supervision, Coaching and Managing Diversity. On-going courses for case managers and supervisors are provided quarterly. The state cannot monitor the effectiveness of the training.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

- Stakeholders reported that basic training is provided to all new workers and until July 1, 2001, had been provided by a private contractor, the Georgia Academy. After July 1, the State began providing the training in a newly developed training unit. During the period under review, basic training consisted of two weeks of classroom training on policies and procedures and one week of on-the-job training, followed by one week of specialized training in the area the worker is assigned. This change is in response to the field’s dissatisfaction with the former new worker training.

- Stakeholders indicated that plans for the new training unit within DFCS call for a collaboration with the Georgia's schools of social work in refining the curriculum. In return, DFCS would serve as a field placement agency for social work students.
- To insure the training has practical applications, it is anticipated that the Consultation and Support Unit, which deals with the counties on a day-to-day basis with real case issues, will have input into the development of both basic and on-going training.

**Areas Needing Improvement**

- Stakeholders felt the classroom training focused too much on theoretical issues and not enough on the day-to-day circumstances and situations the workers actually face. Others described it as inadequate in preparing workers to assume their duties.

**Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

Additional training or ongoing training is provided for the staff that addresses the skills and knowledge bases to carry out their duties. Within 18 months of employment, workers are required to take: Developing and Writing Case Plans, Interviewing for Change, Focusing on Substance Abuse in Families and Toward Cultural Responsiveness. Quarterly Basic Investigative Training and Education is provided. Additional Courses for the supervisor are: Strategic Planning, Substance Abuse Intervention, Stress Management, and Evaluating Case Plans for Successful Outcomes and Evaluating Assessments for Successful Outcomes. The State does not have the capability of monitoring for effectiveness.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

- One of the review sites adopted the practice of sending one or two staff members to identified training sites in or out-of-state where innovative or successful practices have been reported, with the idea that they would take notes and train county staff on the innovative/successful practices.
- Stakeholders commented that there is required in-service training for staff.
- Stakeholders expressed that B.I.T.E. (Basic Investigative Training and Education) is highly effective as ongoing training which involves cross training of other partners.

- Stakeholders reported that the state is collaborating with a consortium of schools of social work to improve educational opportunities for the staff.
- Stakeholders noted that there is 15-day mentoring program for new supervisors. However, some supervisors expressed frustration in getting supervisory training too late.

**Areas Needing Improvement**

- In-service training is required within 18 months of employment. Stakeholders reported that with the high turnover rate among staff, many don't stay with the agency long enough to benefit from in-service training.
- Several stakeholders reported on the need for additional and more timely supervisory training and for specialized training that would benefit experienced staff. Others noted that the training is often too theoretical in nature and not adapted for practical application.
- Additional courses are offered throughout the year on an optional basis. Stakeholders in some of the review sites emphasized the need to make available all courses offered in specific urban areas in all counties. They reported that in-service training is taxing on their travel budgets and therefore under-emphasized.

**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       Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The Division requires prospective foster and adoptive parents to participate in Group Preparation and Selection/Model Approach to Partnership in Parenting (GPS/MAPP). The course is 10 sessions, totaling 30 classroom hours. Once approved the foster/adopt parents must receive 15 hours of training annually.

For child placing agencies, licensed by DHR, the Department requires the completion of job related training annually by all Supervisory and social service staff members whether contracted or employees. Fifteen hours of training is required for staff employed more than 20 hours a week and 7 hours of training for those employed 20 hours or less.

For child placing institutions licensed by DHR required training must include instruction in child abuse policies procedures, reporting

requirements for suspected cases of child abuse, policies and procedures for handling medical emergencies and physical control techniques. Additional training must include 24 clock hours of formal annual training in childcare issues.

Residential treatment programs are required to have a staff development plan, which includes orientation of new staff, assessment of training needs and 45 hours of in-service training per year.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

- Foster parent stakeholders were generally satisfied with the MAPP training they received. A few reported that it did not adequately deal with, nor prepare them for, the issues associated with adolescent foster children.

**Areas Needing Improvement**

- State level stakeholders were aware that MAPP has gaps that need to be filled by other training resources on an in-service basis.
- Foster parents stated that MAPP training needs improvement to adequately prepare foster parents to deal with children that have complex needs and difficult behavior.

**VIII. SERVICE ARRAY**

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

**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

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

Maintaining children with their own families and family reunification are the preferred permanency planning options for all children in Georgia state custody. To support this, Promoting Safe and Stable Families mini-grants, which are located statewide, are utilized. Timely and professional interventions and supports such as family conferencing is the key objective to engage parents and provides the natural supports needed in the early permanency planning process. Early Intervention/Prevention Services, Parent Aide Services, Homestead Services and Prevention of Unnecessary Placement (PUP) all provide a continuum of services designed to prevent unnecessary foster care or support reunification of the child back with their families.

Of the 125 agencies funded during FY 1999, 21 were funded to provide time-limited reunification services to help prevent foster care placement, promote safe, timely and appropriate reunification and provide in-home follow-up support to families whose children have been returned from foster care.

Time-limited reunification services have been particularly effective in safely reunifying families separated due to parental substance abuse. In FY 1999, services to substance abusing mothers and their children increased through the expansion of treatment and post treatment support services funded through PSSF programs.

**Basis: On Site Review**

## **Strengths**

- Case records reviewed at each review site revealed examples of exemplary services that assessed the strengths and needs of families and children to determine their service needs. These services enabled children to remain safely with their own parents while other services promoted permanency for foster and adoptive children. Some examples of these services are Homestead, MATCH, Community Partnership for Protecting Children, Morning Star, Sunshine House, PUP, and First Placement/Best Placement.

## **Areas Needing Improvement**

- Stakeholders and DFCS staff admit that the most critical service need is the availability of foster parents for children requiring an out-of-home placement. There are insufficient numbers of foster parents as well as a lack of available foster parents for distinctive groups of children such as adolescents, children with serious emotional and behavioral issues, and teen mothers and their babies. This inability to match a child's placement needs to an adequate pool of foster parents, fosters the practice of a series of short-term emergency placements or prolonged shelter placements. This critical need for an adequate pool of foster parents leads to placement disruptions and multiple placements.
- Stakeholders stated that while there are examples of exemplary service providers, there continues to be an inadequate number of service providers as well as an insufficient mix of the array and intensity of services to enable a proper service match with the child and families needs. There were examples of several services provided to families with no improvement in outcomes due to the lack of assessment of the families' underlying needs that create safety concerns for their children.
- The following list is critical service needs identified by stakeholders:
  - Resource directories available to all case managers, listing all state, regional, and local services and the providers of these services.
  - A comprehensive service array to promote placement stability available to foster and adoptive families.
  - Expand intensive in-home services to eliminate waiting lists for needed services.
  - Expand the continuum of out-of-home care to include the immediate availability of foster homes, medically fragile foster homes, and therapeutic foster homes.
  - Insure quality Mental Health services are available for all families and children in all counties.
  - Expand the service array to insure all families with serious multiple issues such as mental illness, family violence, and substance abuse have immediate access to needed services.
  - Ensure an adequate service delivery system is available for sexually abused children.
  - Ensure an adequate treatment continuum for adults and youth that are perpetrators of sexual abuse.
  - Expand the pool of dentists available to children in foster homes.
  - Increase support for Kinship Care.

**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

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The services are available in all 159 counties for Promoting Safe and Stable Families.

**Basis: On Site Review**

**Strengths**

- Stakeholders stated that placement prevention services such as Homestead and PUP are accessible in all counties.

**Areas Needing Improvement**

- Stakeholders commented that the needed continuum of individualized, community based services is not accessible or available to families and children in all political jurisdictions. In all three sites, there are issues around the provision, accessibility and availability of appropriate services for needs related to mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence. For additional service needs see Item 35.

**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

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

Timely professional interventions and supports such as family conferencing is a key objective to engage parents and their natural supports early in the permanency planning process. One key component of Georgia’s First Placement/Best Placement strategy is family conferencing. The model focuses on family strengths/needs and resources within the family unit and the community to both engage and support the family. Family conferencing is recommended at critical points such as the child’s entry into care, the development of the 30-day case plan, the multi-disciplinary staffing and periodic reviews.

**Basis: On-Site Review**

**Strengths**

- In the cases reviewed at each site, there were examples of services individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families. Homestead and CHAMPS are two examples. Also, case managers have access to limited flex funds to create services for children and families.

**Areas Needing Improvement**

- In some of the records reviewed, individualized services to families and children were not a universal practice with service providers and case managers.
- In the larger site, there are more standardized services, rather than individualized. For instance, there were situations where anger management services were provided, but not the needed substance abuse services. There is a need to focus more on what families and children need and not just focus on what services are available, not just parenting classes, anger management, etc. There is concern that case managers and even supervisors do not always know what services **are** available.

**IX. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY**

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

## **Basis: Statewide Assessment**

In recent years, Georgia has done a lot to correct the under utilization of community stakeholders. Stakeholders have been involved in planning, evaluating and reshaping the way families experience child welfare services. This was very apparent with the convening of the Child Protective Services Task Force that was formed in January 2000.

The Task Force consisted of 15 members including state and national experts as well as three subcommittees with 75 members from across the state to make recommendations about all issues from within and outside DFCS that would improve the state's ability to protect Georgia's children. Twenty-one recommendations were made in five major areas.

The Task Force members have continued their involvement with the Division in working to implement Task Force recommendations and advocating with the Governor and members of the Legislature to implement them. The support of this Task Force greatly assisted the Division in obtaining funds to implement many of the major recommendations.

Child First and First Placement/Best Placement advisory committees continued to provide stakeholder input, assistance in planning and evaluating for Promoting Safe and Stable Families programs and First Placement/Best Placement programs during the year.

The Children's Justice Act Advisory Committee assumes the major role in advising the Division on the work with other partner in the medical, judicial and law enforcement community to increase the effectiveness of the investigation and prosecution of child abuse. The Advisory committee recommends projects of statewide importance for funding when those projects demonstrate a collaborative and interagency approach. The committee has developed programs designed to improve the handling of child abuse cases, the handling of suspected child abuse or neglect related fatalities, and the investigation and prosecution of cases of child abuse.

There are no recognized Tribes in Georgia.

## **Basis: Onsite Review**

### **Strengths**

- Stakeholders reported that efforts are underway to involve community stakeholders in the formulation of plans to improve services to children and families. Several of these initiatives were begun in the wake of recent media reports critical of the agency in the protective services. At the State level, they include the formation of an advisory committee originally formed to plan for this

review. Subsequent to the review, it is anticipated this committee will formulate plans and action steps for a Program Improvement Plan (PIP).

- Stakeholders reported that advocacy groups played an important role in securing additional funding from the State legislature this year for additional positions and salary increases.
- Stakeholders reported that DFCS offices understood the importance of involving community stakeholders in collaborations and partnerships. Efforts in this area included joint training with CPS staff and those of other service providers, such as mental health workers, school counselors, and law enforcement officers, and the aforementioned joint MAPP training with foster and adoptive parents. Other efforts include monthly inter-agency meetings, at which staff discuss and plan for services to families known to several agencies.
- Stakeholders commented that while State law requires that guardians ad litem be licensed attorneys, thus limiting the extent of outside advocacy, several counties are experimenting with Court Appointed Special Advocate or CASA programs, which enable non-attorney citizens to participate in court proceedings, thus increasing community involvement.
- Stakeholders explained that in 148 counties, DFCS works closely with Family Connections, a network of service providers established to resolve substance abuse and family issues, such as domestic violence.

**Areas Needing Improvement**

- Community partners expressed frustration and concern about the agency’s response to negative media attention. Community partners suggested that the State needs to have a proactive response to negative media and strengthen public relations.
- Because of the Open Records Policy, DFCS workers stated that they are operating out of fear that something will happen in a case that might cause their name to appear on the front page of the newspaper. Workers question how they will be supported if something goes wrong.

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

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The Child Welfare Advisory Committee is an expansion of the Child First Committee developed to get community stakeholders’ input into the state’s Child and Family Services Plan.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

## Strengths

- Stakeholders reported that in the past year, DHR hosted several statewide forums in order to secure the collaboration of community stakeholders in assessing needs and joint planning. These forums have led to increased collaborations with courts and judges, and better working relationships with community resources.
- Stakeholders reported that the high level task forces set up in the wake of a series of newspaper articles critical of the State's child welfare services, has strengthened the working relationship between DFCS and community organizations.
- In the area of adoptions, stakeholders commented that DFCS has hosted several adoption fairs and has experimented with teleconferences between prospective adoptive parents and children available for adoption. These efforts, in part, have contributed to the overall increase in adoptions.

### **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       Area Needing Improvement

#### **Basis: Statewide Assessment**

Georgia DFCS manages the Multi-Agency Team for Children (MATCH) program. This program arranges care for Georgia's most severely emotionally disturbed children. It is multi-agency serving children and partnering with the Department of Education, DMHM RSA (Department of Mental Health/Mental Retardation/Substance Abuse, DFCS and DJJ. Georgia participates in the Georgia Mental Health Planning and Advisory Council. Georgia is in the process of developing a DFCS/DJJ agreement. The State is also partnering with TANF to provide Relative Care Subsidy to families, which was implemented spring 2001.

#### **Basis: Onsite Review**

##### **Strengths**

- Stakeholders reported that MATCH (Multi-agency Team for Children) is a collaboration between other state agencies such as Mental Health and Department of Juvenile Justice to arrange services for severe emotional children who may or may not be in the custody of the State.
- Stakeholders reported collaboration with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to serve youth exiting the system and the establishment of the Youth Leadership Council.

## **Areas Needing Improvement**

- Stakeholders reported concerns about a lack of coordination with law enforcement agencies around child abuse or neglect investigations, indicating the need for the joint development of protocols. Where coordination with law enforcement agencies worked better, stakeholders attributed it, in part, to joint training, and the identification of specific police officers assigned to work with DFCS on child welfare cases.
- Several stakeholders expressed concern about DFCS ability to serve a large and growing Hispanic population. A shortage or absence of Spanish speaking caseworkers has presented serious communication problems and points to the need for DFCS to diligently recruit bilingual staff.

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

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

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

  X   Strength      Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The State, through the Office of Regulatory Services, has outlined rules and regulations for child placing and child caring institutions. All private agencies used by Georgia DFCS for the placement of children in care must be licensed by the Department of Human Resources’ Office of Regulatory Services (ORS) as a child caring institution if they provide group care to six or more children or as a child placing agency if they provide family foster care. In addition to the CCI or CPA license, private agencies are approved by DFCS for the placement of DFCS children. ORS conducts annual re-licensing, visits and investigates complaints. All reports of ORS findings are forwarded to DFCS for review and consideration. Private agencies providing therapeutic services have additional programmatic standards. Therapeutic programs must be certified in compliance with the standards of the multi-agency team for children (MATCH) for the type(s) of service provided.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

- Stakeholders and case record review indicated that licensing standards are in place.
- Record review and interviews with stakeholders revealed that license re-certifications are completed yearly.
- Stakeholders stated that MAPP (Model Approach to Partnership in Parenting) training is provided to all foster and adoptive parents.

**Item 42. The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or childcare institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The State licensing standards apply to all family homes or childcare institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds. Adoptive homes developed through contracts with the Office of Adoptions are approved by a specialist in the state office to insure compliance with standards for approval. All group homes and child caring institutions are reviewed by ORS for compliance with the CCI rules and regulations. Although DFCS foster homes are approved by DFCS staff and not ORS, ORS has developed its CPA rules and regulations to assure consistency with DFCS policy. Related and nonrelated homes have the same approval standard pursuant to federal laws.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strength**

- Stakeholders stated that standards are applied uniformly to related and non-related homes.

**Areas Needing Improvement**

- Stakeholders reported that licensing standards for the public and private sector are different. Private agency foster family homes and group homes used by DFCS must be both licensed by ORS and approved by DFCS. Public homes and shelters are approved by DFCS. As prescribed in CFR 1355.20 (a)(2), there must be one licensing standard applied to all foster family homes.
- Stakeholders stated that the local county directors grant waivers of the minimum standards for foster homes that exceeds the required number of six because of the lack of placement resources. This sometimes compromises the safety of the children in the home.

**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

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

Criminal records checks are done on all staff and potential parents including staff of child placing agencies. ORS monitors the criminal checks for child placing agency staff. DHR policy requires a criminal record check, complete with fingerprints, for all adoptive and foster parents and all adults age 18 or over, residing in the home either permanently or temporarily, who have access to the children. The Georgia Crime Information Center performs the criminal background clearances. Any reported offenses must be fully explored with the parties involved in accordance with ASFA guidelines. Policy details the offenses for which approval maybe granted.

**Basis: Onsite Review**

**Strengths**

- Stakeholders stated that criminal background checks are consistently completed for all foster and adoptive providers by the GBI (Georgia Bureau of Investigation). In addition, they state that persons in the home over 18 must have a criminal background check completed. They would like to see this changed to include a criminal background check through the FBI since persons move from state to state.
- Stakeholders reported that every five years background checks are conducted again as part of a comprehensive re-certification process.

**Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.**

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

Child specific recruitment in Georgia is the responsibility of both the county and state offices of adoption. The Department has contracted with various private agencies to provide for the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children needing homes. In Georgia, 74% of available children needing adoptive placements are African American. About 58% are male and about 42% female. A private public relations agency is developing a statewide recruitment plan

for foster care and adoption. The marketing strategy of the agency is called Geodemographics or neighborhood lifestyle segmentation strategies. These strategies are used to identify and profile families in communities throughout the state.

A Faith in Families Program was established in 2000 to promote a partnership between the agency and the faith community.

### **Basis: Onsite Review**

#### **Strengths**

- Stakeholders state the following:
  - There is a State Resource Development Unit to provide a policy structure to counties for the recruitment of foster parents.
  - The State contracts with private agencies to recruit foster and adoptive homes.
  - The State develops an annual recruitment plan and requires reporting from the counties.
  - County Directors are held accountable for recruitment in their performance evaluation.
  - County staff is provided training on recruitment.
  - There is an initiative with Casey Family for retention and recruitment.
  - In one site, the county has designated two persons who are responsible for recruitment of foster homes.
  - One county office has utilized newspaper articles, local television programs, public service recruitment spots, booths at local fairs and had religious/church wide programs to recruit foster parents.

#### **Areas Needing Improvement**

- Stakeholders agreed that the State is in dire need of placement resources. In the larger county, this causes overuse and overcrowding of emergency shelters and placement of sibling groups.
- Stakeholders in a smaller site reported there is a need for an emergency shelter.
- Stakeholders expressed there is a need for more specialized homes to accommodate teenagers and children with special needs.
- Stakeholders stated that private agencies are interested in providing foster/group care. Private providers are paid the same foster care maintenance payment as public foster homes which is \$12-\$14 a day. The private provider rate is \$40 per day.
- Stakeholders stated that the State does not fund foster parent recruitment.
- Stakeholders reported that the State should do more around retention issues, such as supportive services, respite and incentive payments.
- Stakeholders agreed that more recruitment efforts should be made to reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children.

**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        X   Area Needing Improvement

**Basis: Statewide Assessment**

The Office of Adoptions has contracted with a licensed private adoption agency to process all interstate private and independent adoptions. Through the contract, county departments are relieved of these responsibilities in an attempt to get studies of Georgia families adopting children with special needs completed as quickly as possible. This is a relatively new contract; therefore, the effect of whether placements are completed more quickly is unknown. Records indicate that in 1999, there was a total of 512 children placed through ICPC. In 2000, another 278 cross-jurisdictional placements occurred.

In an effort to address state barriers to placing children cross-jurisdictionally, the Office of Adoptions has partnered with South Carolina in a project called “Tale of Two States” sponsored by the Children’s Bureau Adoption Opportunities Grant. Through this project, the following barriers were identified: different reporting requirements by each state, lack of training, staff turnover, insufficient ICPC resources, staff attitudes related to interstate placements, workloads and arrangements of pre-placements visitation of child and family. Georgia will continue to collaborate with South Carolina to implement a pilot project between the two states to address the barriers during the next 3 years. Because the project is still in the planning stages, the pilot has not yet been implemented.

The Office of Adoptions website, Wednesday’s Child on Fox 5 WAGA-TV in Atlanta, newsletter and other printed media are also used to recruit adoptive parents.

All available children are registered in the “My Turn Now” website which can be accessed by any family via internet. Another activity that has been successful for strengthening recruitment of families for children intra-jurisdictionally takes place through videoconference matching meetings held every other month through a contract with Lumpe & Frost.

## **Basis: Onsite Review**

### **Strengths**

- The Office of Adoptions initiated a project between Georgia and South Carolina to address cross-jurisdictional placement. The project is funded by an Adoption Opportunities Grant and called “Tale of Two States”. Phase I of this project identified barriers to cross-jurisdictional placement. Phase II is now developing joint training between Georgia and South Carolina. Phase III will bring in other states.
- Stakeholders reported that the State contracts with private agencies to recruit foster and adoptive homes.
- The State has a process in place for cross-jurisdictional placement.

## XI. DETERMINATION OF SUBSTANTIAL CONFORMITY

For each outcome and systemic factor listed below, mark “Y” where the State is determined to be in substantial conformity and “N” where the State is determined not to be in substantial conformity. For each outcome or systemic factor marked “N,” place a check beside the performance indicator, listed by item number in this form, that has been determined to be an area needing improvement.

### Safety

  N   Outcome S1  
              Item 1  
              Item 2  
  
  N   Outcome S2  
         x   Item 3  
         x   **Item 4**  
         x   **Item 21**

### Permanency

  N   Outcome P1  
              Item 5  
         x   **Item 6**  
         x   Item 7  
              Item 8  
         x   Item 9  
         x   Item 10  
  
  N   Outcome P2  
              Item 11  
         x   Item 12  
         x   Item 13  
              Item 14  
              Item 15  
              Item 16

### Child and Family Well-Being

  N   Outcome WB1  
         x   Item 17  
         x   Item 18  
         x   Item 19  
         x   Item 20  
  
  N   Outcome WB2

  N   Outcome WB3  
         x   Item 22  
         x   Item 23

### Systemic Factors

  N   Statewide Information System  
         x   Item 24  
  
  Y   Case Review System  
         x   Item 25  
              Item 26  
              Item 27  
              Item 28  
              Item 29

### Y   Quality Assurance System

       Item 30  
       Item 31  
  
  Y   Training  
              Item 32  
         x   Item 33  
              Item 34

### N   Service Array

  x   Item 35  
  x   Item 36  
  x   Item 37

### Y   Agency Responsiveness to the Community

       Item 38  
       Item 39  
  x   Item 40

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

       Item 41  
  x   Item 42  
       Item 43  
  x   Item 44  
       Item 45