

Benton County Minnesota Child and Family Service Review

Program Improvement Plan

I. General Information	
County Agency Name: Benton County Human Services	Address: PO Box 740, Foley, Minnesota 56329
	Telephone Number: 320-968-5087
County Person Primarily Responsible for PIP: Bruce DeGrote	E-mail Address: Bdegrote@co.benton.mn.us
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To be completed by DHS:

Date Draft PIP Submitted by County:	Date PIP Approved: October 8, 2007
Due Dates for Quarterly Updates: December 31, 2007, March 31, 2008, June 30, 2008 and September 30, 2008	
	PIP Completion Date: September 30, 2008

II: Program Improvement Plan Narrative *Detailed instructions and additional information on the following narrative is available in the PIP instructions*

Introduction and Performance Summary: Include when the MnCF SR was completed and a summary of performance in outcomes, performance items and national standards.

Benton County Family Services participated in a Minnesota Child and Family Service Review of their county's child welfare services in December 2006. Nine cases of children in the child welfare system from October 2005 through December 2006 were reviewed. Four in-home cases and five placement cases were reviewed.

The county had ratings of strength on 14 out of 23 performance items. Items that were aggregately rated as areas needing improvement and contributed to non-conformity are addressed in this Program Improvement Plan and include Items 1, 5, 7, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19 and 23.

Benton County met five out of six national standards, including: recurrence of maltreatment, incidence of child abuse/neglect in foster care, stability of foster care placement and length of time to achieve reunification and adoption. The national standard that contributed to non-conformity, foster care re-entries is addressed in the following Program Improvement Plan.

Cross Cutting Themes Identified During MnCF SR: Provide a description of crosscutting themes and systemic issues that affect multiple areas of the county's performance.

The central theme identified during the review is the need for more worker visits with children to support positive outcomes. One contributing factor may be staff turnover. The review identified worker turnover as negatively impacting the continuity of services. When not at full staff, workers prioritize their time to ensure that safety considerations are met for children. However, this does impact the worker's ability to make regular/routine client contact with children and complete mental health screenings.

Description of Overarching Strategies: Provide a description of program improvement strategies and identify strengths or promising practices that can be effective in making improvements in multiple areas. Include discussion on staff orientation/training in relation to the MnCF SR and Program Improvement Plan.

1. Strategies will be developed and implemented to reduce worker turnover.
2. Review PIP tips at staff meetings and trainings.
3. Update policy, procedures, checklists and other job aides.
4. Utilize the QA tool kit and case review system.
5. Enhance the case consultation format to include specific questions about visits with parents and siblings, preserving family connections, needs and services to children, parents and foster parents, child and family involvement in the case planning and frequency of worker visits with the child.
6. Continue use of Family Group Decision Making.
7. The need for at least monthly contact with children and their families and the reason for this contact will be discussed at staff meetings at least quarterly. Qualitative case reviews and quarterly audits will support these efforts.

Description of Methods of Measurement/Monitoring: Provide a description of the evaluation approaches that will be used for measuring improvement, e.g. Qualitative Case Review System and review of relevant SSIS reports.

Qualitative measurements will be completed by using the qualitative case review system. The supervisor will review one case per worker each quarter using the DHS Quality Assurance Tool kit. In addition, there will be monthly and quarterly Supervisory review of relevant Social Service Information Reports (SSIS).

Plan for the Development and Dissemination of the PIP: Provide a description of the process used for developing and soliciting input on the PIP, e.g. who was involved, and the plan for dissemination of the PIP to agency staff and community partners.

PIP development and discussion occurred with the Director, County Attorney and Child Protection Unit. The PIP will be disseminated and discussed with the Director, County Attorney, Child Protection Unit, Case Consultation Team and CJI Team.

III. Matrix

SAFETY OUTCOME 1: Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect	
Item 1: Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment	
Performance at time of review (%): 60%	Performance Goal (%): 90%
Issues noted in the final report: In the three cases rated as Strengths, children were seen within legal timeframes, including examples in which multiple maltreatment reports were received during the period under review. All traditional child protection reports received same-day responses. Both cases rated as Area Needing Improvement were Family Assessment responses which were initiated within timelines, but face-to-face contact was not made with the children within timelines. In one case, the worker was making efforts to locate the family, but did not meet required timelines outlined by state statute.	
Person(s) responsible for implementing action steps and monitoring progress:	

Action Steps	Date to be Completed	Methods of Measurement/Monitoring	Quarterly Updates
<p>Enhance policy and procedures to ensure that all child victims are observed by staff within timelines and documented.</p> <p>Orient team to enhanced policy and procedures. Staff will document in the case file any barriers to making timely face to face contact with child victims.</p>	January 2008	<p>SSIS report, time to Initial County Contact with victim. Review the report on at least a quarterly basis.</p> <p>Supervisory case review of all assessments upon closing or transfer. QA Tool kit (Review one case per worker per quarter)</p>	

PERMANENCY OUTCOME 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situation

Item 5: Foster care re-entries	
Performance at time of review (%): 66.7%	Performance Goal (%): 30%
Issues noted in the final report: In one case, trial home visits (THV) were being used to support a reunification effort and prevent re-entry. In a second case, protective supervision was used to support reunification and prevent re-entry. In the one case rated an Area Needing Improvement, a child entered foster care twice within 12 months for essentially the same reasons. The mother's underlying chemical abuse was also a factor in the re-entry.	
Person(s) responsible for implementing action steps and monitoring progress:	

Action Steps	Date to be Completed	Methods of Measurement/Monitoring	Quarterly Updates
Continue consistent use of the pre-placement screening team.	Ongoing	QA Took Kit (Review one case per worker per quarter).	
Timely referrals to Family Group Decision Making.	Ongoing	SSIS Charting and Analysis: (quarterly) Federal Indicator 4.2	
Monitor placements on a monthly basis.	Ongoing		
Use SDM Reunification Assessment and base reunification plans on level of risk and safety.	Ongoing		
All foster care re-entries will be reviewed by the pre-placement screening team.	Ongoing		

PERMANENCY OUTCOME 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situation
Data Indicator: Foster Care Re-Entries

National Standard: 8.6%	County Performance (2005) : 25%	Performance Goal : 15%
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Person(s) responsible for implementing action steps and monitoring progress:

Action Steps	Date to be Completed	Methods of Measurement/Monitoring	Quarterly Updates
Same as listed for Item #5.			

PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children	
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care	
Performance at time of review : 80%	Performance Goal : 90%
Issues noted in the final report: Reviewers noted multiple examples of practices to support visitation at a frequency that met children=s needs. The case reviews indicated that there were written visitation plans, frequent and liberal visitation, access to two supervised visitation resources, and inclusion of extended family members in visitation plans. Although mothers participated in more frequent visitation in comparison to fathers, caseworkers made significant, ongoing efforts to engage fathers and resolve barriers to visitation. In the one case rated an Area Needing Improvement, there was a gap in a mother’s visitation with her child that was determined to be inconsistent with the child=s needs.	
Person(s) responsible for implementing action steps and monitoring progress:	

Action Steps	Date to be Completed	Methods of Measurement/Monitoring	Quarterly Updates
<p>Continue regular teaming of cases with an emphasis on reviewing the visitation plan.</p> <p>“PIP Tips” distributed to staff and discussed at staff meetings.</p> <p>Case notes will document efforts made to ongoing develop visitation plan with parents and siblings in foster care.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>January 2008</p>	<p>QA Tool Kit (Reviewing one case per worker per quarter).</p>	

PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children	
Item 14: Preserving connections	
Performance at time of review : 80%	Performance Goal : 90%
<p>Issues noted in the final report: Important connections may include schools, religion, culture and extended family. Caseworkers supported children=s relationships with extended families c both maternal and paternal. In one adoption case, the agency searched for the adoptive home that had previously adopted the child's birth sibling, and placed the two little girls together.</p> <p>In one ICWA case, tribal social services and BCHS are working together. In addition, the tribal caseworker praised the efforts of the agency worker for her attempts to preserve the tribal connections for this child. In one case rated an Area Needing Improvement, a child had siblings living in another county, and visits between the siblings were not arranged or provided.</p>	
Person(s) responsible for implementing action steps and monitoring progress:	

Action Steps	Date to be Completed	Methods of Measurement/Monitoring	Quarterly Updates
<p>Continued teaming of cases on a regular basis with a special emphasis of reviewing the plan to preserve connections.</p> <p>Case notes will document efforts made to preserve connection for the child.</p>	Ongoing	QA Tool Kit (Reviewing one case per worker per quarter).	

WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children=s needs	
Item 17: Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents	
Performance at time of review : 56%	Performance Goal :
<p>Issues noted in the final report: In the five cases rated as a Strength, the agency arranged or provided for comprehensive assessments of the needs of parents, children and foster parents. Examples included chemical dependency and psychological evaluations, as well as parenting assessments. There were numerous examples of informal assessments made by agency caseworkers during home visits with children, parents and foster parents. The agency arranges or provides for an extensive array of services, including: child protection case management, in-home therapy and skills, child and adult mental health, independent living skills services, and chemical dependency treatment for older adolescents. Multiple services were used to address family needs, including specialized assessments and reassessments over the life of the case.</p> <p>Four cases were rated as Area Needing improvement. The factors that contributed to this rating included comprehensive assessment and services for some, but not all, family members. In four cases, parents' needs were not fully assessed or needs addressed through services. In one case, a child's needs were not assessed and services were not provided.</p>	
Person(s) responsible for implementing action steps and monitoring progress:	

Action Steps	Date to be Completed	Methods of Measurement/Monitoring	Quarterly Updates
Continued teaming of cases at unit meeting on a regular basis with a special emphasis on reviewing the needs and services of the child's parents and foster parents.	Ongoing	QA Tool Kit (Reviewing one case per worker per quarter).	
Review policy and procedure of using the SDM Family Assessment of Needs and Strengths and how to incorporate that assessment into the case planning process.	January 2008		
"PIP Tips" distribute to staff and discussed at staff meeting.	January 2008		
Staff attend SDM training for Risk Assessment and Risk Re-assessment.	July 2007		

WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children=s needs	
Item 18: Child and family involvement in case planning	
Performance at time of review : 78%	Performance Goal (%): 90%
<p>Issues noted in the final report: In the seven cases rated as a Strength, parents, foster parents and children, when appropriate, were actively included in the development of their case plans. The agency caseworkers= strong engagement skills were recognized by family members, and those skills positively impacted performance on this item. Parents spoke very highly of caseworkers who listened to them and who included their ideas in case plans. Extended family, tribal social services, guardians ad litem, and in-home providers were often included in the case planning process. Fathers were included in case planning less often than were mothers, but there were active efforts by agency caseworkers to engage fathers in that process. Finally, Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) was used to help gather family input into the development of case plans.</p> <p>There were two cases rated as Area Needing Improvement. In one case, children of sufficient age were not included in the case planning process. In the other case there was not a current case plan in the file. However, case-related interviews indicated that the adoptive parents had been engaged by the caseworker in the case planning process, but no specific needs were identified prior to the case closing and finalization of the adoption.</p>	
Person(s) responsible for implementing action steps and monitoring progress:	

Action Steps	Date to be Completed	Methods of Measurement/Monitoring	Quarterly Updates
Case notes will document efforts made to engage both parents in case planning.	Ongoing	QA Tool Kit (Reviewing one case per worker per quarter).	
Engagement of parents in case planning will be discussed at staff meetings.	Ongoing	SSIS reports (Run quarterly): Service Plan Report, Workgroups without Open Service Plans, Placements without open Out of Home Placement Plans.	
PIP Tips will be distributed to staff and discussed at staff meetings.	January 2008		
Discuss "non-custodial parent involvement" and "legal authority for placement" at all pre-placement screenings.	Ongoing		

WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children=s needs	
Item 19: Worker visits with child	
Performance at time of review : 67%	Performance Goal : 85%
<p>Issues noted in the final report: In six cases, caseworkers made it a priority to meet with children at a frequency matched to the children=s needs. A number of cases involved very young children, and caseworkers spent time observing and reviewing the needs of these children with caregivers. In one case, child protection and children=s mental health workers successfully transitioned services and maintained frequent worker contacts with an adolescent in LTFC.</p> <p>There were three cases rated as Area Needing Improvement. In these cases, reviewers identified that more frequent worker contact would have supported closer monitoring of risk and safety. In one case, children were on a THV. In another case, a victim and an offender were living in the same house. Finally, in one low-risk case, the worker arranged for in-home services, but did not meet with the child for over five months.</p>	
Person(s) responsible for implementing action steps and monitoring progress:	

Action Steps	Date to be Completed	Methods of Measurement/Monitoring	Quarterly Updates
<p>Case notes will document monthly or more frequent as needed worker visits with child.</p> <p>Challenges in meeting monthly visits with child requirement will be discussed at staff meetings.</p> <p>“PIP Tips” will be distributed to staff and discussed at staff meetings.</p> <p>Frequency of contact to be based upon risk assessment.</p>	<p>January 2008</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>January 2008</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>QA Tool Kit (Review one case per worker per quarter).</p> <p>SSIS Report: Workgroups that Need Contact run quarterly.</p>	

WELL-BEING OUTCOME 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs	
Item 23: Mental health of the child	
Performance at time of review : 50%	Performance Goal : 85%
Issues noted in the final report: In three of four applicable cases, preschool aged children received social/emotional screenings to identify early children's mental health issues. In one case, a child was provided with numerous evaluations and treatment. In two cases, children were also receiving children's mental health case management, and there was effective service coordination between the child protection worker and the children's mental health worker. In all four cases rated as Area Needing Improvement, required children's mental health screening tools were not completed and there were no alternative mental health assessments provided.	
Person(s) responsible for implementing action steps and monitoring progress:	

Action Steps	Date to be Completed	Methods of Measurement/Monitoring	Quarterly Updates
<p>Policy and Procedures for Children's Mental Health Screenings will be reviewed with staff.</p> <p>Support Staff will review SSIS workgroups to ensure screenings have been done, and give reminders to case managers as needed.</p>	<p>January 2008</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>SSIS CMH Screening Report will be reviewed on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>QA Tool Kit (Review one case per worker per quarter).</p>	

SYSTEMIC ISSUES:	
County Self Rating (from Self Assessment):	Goal:
<p>Issues noted in the final report: Quality Assurance System: Benton County has a number of informal and formal quality assurance practices in place. Current practices include supervisory review of case plans, supervisor conferences, and children=s services team meetings. The agency would benefit from the expansion of their quality assurance system to evaluate qualitative measures through internal case reviews, with a focus on supporting practices most likely to result in positive outcomes for children and families.</p>	
Person(s) responsible for implementing action steps and monitoring progress:	

Action Steps	Date to be Completed	Methods of Measurement/Monitoring	Quarterly Updates
Implement use of QA Tool Kit, reviewing one case per worker per quarter.	Sept. 2007 and Ongoing	QA Tool Kit	

SYSTEMIC ISSUES:	
County Self Rating (from Self Assessment):	Goal:
<p>Issues noted in the final report: Benton County has 15 very devoted and qualified foster/adoptive homes. Multiple efforts have been made to recruit new homes, including advertising through radio, fair booths, letters to the editor, and personal invitation. New homes are regularly licensed, but homes are lost periodically due to a variety of reasons. In addition to county child foster/adoptive homes, there are a number of professional foster home agencies that license homes in the St. Cloud area. These professional agencies help ensure that there are adequate foster/adoptive family resources. Stakeholder interviews indicated that there remains a need to recruit and train additional local foster care resources. This would be an important systemic factor to address on an ongoing basis.</p>	
<p>Person(s) responsible for implementing action steps and monitoring progress: Sandi Shoberg</p>	

Action Steps	Date to be Completed	Methods of Measurement/Monitoring	Quarterly Updates
<p>Benton County will increase recruiting efforts by putting ads & flyers in the newspaper. We will mail letters to various businesses & organizations requesting they post our recruitment flyer.</p>	<p>July 2007 and Ongoing</p>	<p>Supervisor will meet with licensing staff to review progress.</p>	
<p>Benton County will increase training options for providers by providing several free trainings at the county. We will also mail other training options to providers several times a year. We will develop an email group for providers to increase our ability to contact providers regarding training.</p>	<p>July 2007 and Ongoing</p>	<p>Supervisor will set up various trainings.</p>	
<p>Benton County, as part of STARS for Children's Mental Health, is part of a four county effort utilizing Grant money to recruit & train respite care providers. PATH has been selected as the agency to implement this plan. Our agency will encourage these providers to</p>	<p>Beginning July 2007 to Dec. 2007</p>	<p>Supervisor will monitor as a part of STARS.</p>	

consider "regular" foster care placements as well as respite placement.			
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