

Evaluating Minnesota's Child Welfare System: A Review of Safety, Permanency and Well-being Outcomes for Children and Families in the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Safety Findings

Status of Safety Outcome 1

Status of Safety Outcome 2

Permanency Findings

Status of Permanency Outcome 1

Status of Permanency Outcome 2

Well-being Findings

Status of Well-being Outcome 1

Status of Well-being Outcome 2

Status of Well-being Outcome 3

Systemic Factors

Program Improvement Plan Recommendations

Appendix

Table 1: Federal Data Indicators Performance Chart

Table 2: Completed Face-to-face Contacts with Alleged child Victims

Table 3: Length of Placement Episodes ending in 2008

Table 4: Children in Out-of-home Care by Placement Setting

Table 5: MnCFSR Outcomes and Items Performance Ratings

Executive Summary

Through the American Indian Child Welfare Initiative (AICWI), the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (Band) began working together in 2006 to accomplish the following goals:

Build tribal child welfare service delivery capacity

Deliver a full continuum of child welfare services

Demonstrate tribal leadership and management of child welfare programs which leads to better outcomes for children and families on the reservation and reduces the overrepresentation of American Indian children in the child welfare system

Provide child welfare services in a culturally meaningful way that will result in improved child safety, permanency and well-being.

Phase I activities of the AICWI, planning and capacity building, commenced in early 2007. During this phase, the Band hired and trained child welfare staff, provided child abuse/neglect prevention and family preservation services; expanded foster care resources and reunification services; gained technology and trained staff necessary to operate major state information systems, including the Social Service Information System (SSIS), and interfaces with IV-E eligibility and child support systems. Phase II, full continuum of service delivery and activities, started a year later, in early 2008. Phase II benchmarks included implementation of a 24-hour, seven-day week child protection response system to accept and respond to new reports of child maltreatment; and transfer of AICWI eligible cases from counties to the Band. Most case transfers were completed by July 2008, marking the fully operational AICWI for the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe.

DHS conducted a Minnesota Child and Family Service Review (MnCFSR) of the child welfare system of the Band in August 2009, which marked a year from the time the Band had assumed responsibility for the full continuum of child welfare services. The MnCFSR was one part of an overall plan for evaluating outcomes of the AICWI. Findings for the review were derived from a self assessment prepared by the Leech Lake Indian Child Welfare agency, performance on national standard indicators, ratings on outcomes and performance items from an onsite case review, and input from community stakeholders. The MnCFSR identified strengths and areas needing improvement in child welfare practice and systems in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being. Findings from the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe MnCFSR identified many areas of strength in practice and in overall systems, and other areas where program improvements will be necessary. Overall, findings were comparable and consistent with statewide findings from MnCFSR's conducted in 87 counties across the state of Minnesota over the past six years.

Review Process Summary

The MnCFSR is modeled after the federal Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) process. DHS has been conducting MnCFSRs with counties since 2003 and, in 2009, with the Leech Lake and White Earth Bands of Ojibwe. The goal of the MnCFSR is to improve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes by promoting family-centered, community-based and individualized interventions to strengthen parental capacity.

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Indian Child Welfare agency completed a self assessment. This process provided the agency with an opportunity to evaluate strengths and areas needing improvement across eight systemic factors that provide a framework for the delivery of child welfare services. The MnCFSR further examines these systemic factors through stakeholder interviews and an onsite case review.

The onsite case review consisted of an examination of six randomly selected cases involving children who received child welfare services between Sept. 1, 2008, and Aug. 19, 2009. State Quality Assurance consultants partnered with Leech Lake Indian Child

Welfare staff to conduct the case reviews. Six Initiative-eligible, non-county transfer cases, were reviewed, including five placement and one non-placement case. Records selected for the review were presumed to be representative of agency practice, with recognition that ratings were based on a relatively small sample of cases measured against high performance standards. To supplement information collected through file reviews, case reviewers also conducted case-related interviews with key participants in each case, including parents, service providers and agency caseworkers.

Community stakeholders provided an additional source of information regarding the strengths and needs of the tribal child welfare system. Six stakeholder interviews were conducted and included the following individuals and/or groups: agency caseworkers, agency administration, mandated reporters, tribal court judge, Child Welfare Commission, legal counsel and foster parents.

Performance Summary

Performance in the case review process is measured through the evaluation and rating of 23 performance items and seven outcomes. Performance items are specific practices that support achievement of broader outcomes. Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe had the strongest findings in Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations), Permanency Outcome 2 (The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children), and Well-being Outcome 2 (Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs).

Outcome areas and performance items rated as needing improvement included Safety Outcome 1 (Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect), Safety Outcome 2 (Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate), and Well-being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs).

Key Findings

Key findings from the Minnesota Child and Family Service Review included:

Safety Findings

Timeliness of the agency's response to child maltreatment reports is an area needing improvement based on results from case reviews and the agency's broader performance data.

The agency met the federal safety data indicator for child abuse/neglect in foster care; there were no examples of repeat maltreatment in a majority of cases reviewed.

The agency works collaboratively with its community partners and families to address risk and safety concerns. However, the case reviews indicated improvements were needed in practices related to placement prevention, as well as risk and safety management.

Permanency Findings

Placement stability was identified, overall, as a strong practice area. Case review findings and data for the three corresponding national standards identified success in agency efforts to support and maintain children in stable placement settings. Agency relative placement practices also contributed to placement stability.

The agency met national standards for achieving timely reunification. Case review findings and data on national standards both reflected timely achievement of permanency.

Agency practices support children's relationships with their family and community. However, there were inconsistent practices in assessing and addressing visitation needs and resolving barriers to frequent, quality visitation between children and parents.

Well-being Findings

Inconsistent practices related to assessing needs, providing targeted services, engaging appropriate family members in case planning, and caseworker visits limited agency efforts to achieve well-being outcomes for children and families. The agency's strongest performance was in assessing and addressing children's educational and physical health needs.

There were examples of agency staff engaging parents and children in developing and reviewing case plans. Case reviews indicated positive working relationships between families and caseworkers. However, additional efforts are needed to ensure engagement and that current, written case plans are completed in every case.

Caseworker visits with children was an area needing improvement. Improving the frequency and quality of these visits is a priority for program improvement planning.

Children's educational needs were consistently met and addressed in the cases reviewed.

Agency efforts to meet the physical, dental and mental health needs of children were inconsistent.

Systemic Factors

Findings from this review suggested that staff turnover and unmet training needs negatively affected agency efforts to achieve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children and families. Enhancing these systems would support improved outcome performance.

The agency does not have a formal internal quality assurance system to monitor casework practice or measure outcomes.

Developing an internal quality assurance system would assist the agency in evaluating whether program improvement activities resulted in improved outcomes for children and families.

Program Improvement Plan

The success of the Minnesota Child and Family Service Review is ultimately demonstrated by changes in practice that support improved outcomes for children and families. The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe will prepare a Program Improvement Plan to address key areas needing improvement. Capitalizing on systemic strengths and effective child welfare practices will provide a strong foundation for program improvement to promote positive outcomes for children and families.

Complete copies of Minnesota Child and Family Service Review self assessments, reports, and program improvement plans are available on the DHS Web site at: http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/CPSupervisors/id_059503.

Safety findings

When evaluating Safety, all children in the family were considered and ratings were made in both placement and in-home cases.
 Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect

Outcome or Performance Item	Performance Item Ratings			Outcome Ratings			
	Strength	Area Needing Improvement	NA	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	NA
Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.				3	2	1	0
Item 1: Timeliness of initiating assessments/ investigations of reports of child maltreatment	3	3	0				
Item 2: Repeat maltreatment	5	1	0				

Case Review Findings

Item 1: Timeliness of initiating assessments/investigations. This item evaluated whether the agency responded to child maltreatment reports in a timely manner, including face-to-face contacts with alleged child victims within the time frames required by statute. There were seven Family Assessments (FA) and four traditional investigations completed in the six cases reviewed. Three cases were rated as a Strength because the agency completed timely face-to-face contact with children in response to maltreatment reports. Most child protection reports were screened and assigned within 24 hours of receipt. This practice supported timely face-to-face contact with children.

Three cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement because face-to-face contact did not occur, or did not occur within required timelines. Delays in contacting children occurred in both substantial and non-substantial child endangerment reports. Identified barriers included caseworkers not being clear about what the assessment/investigation process entailed.

Item 2: Repeat maltreatment. This item evaluated whether children were victims of repeat maltreatment arising from the same general conditions or by the same perpetrator within a six-month period. Multiple case openings resulting from a Family Assessment to address safety concerns were also considered when evaluating this item. Five cases were rated as a Strength because, during the period under review, there were maltreatment determinations or decisions to provide services following a Family Assessment (FA) to address safety concerns, and there were no other determinations or findings within six months. One case was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because children experienced two episodes of maltreatment within two weeks; the circumstances and the perpetrator were the same.

Child Welfare Data: The department's Timeliness to Child Contact 2009 Report measures the timeliness of the agency's responses to all reports accepted for assessment or investigation. In January through June 2009, the agency made timely face-to-face contacts with children in 16.7 percent of reports alleging substantial child endangerment (SCE) requiring a response within 24 hours, and 30.3 percent of reports that did not include allegations of SCE, requiring a response within five days. The agency's performance is lower than statewide performance (Appendix, Table 2).

Stakeholder Input. Stakeholders indicate that the process for making child protection reports is clear, and appreciate the opportunity to consult with designated intake staff. They also report that current assessment workers have effective engagement skills that draw upon the strengths of children, families and communities, resolving client fear and agreeing on services. Regarding areas requiring additional attention, some mandated reporters indicate they would appreciate receiving feedback on agency screening decisions.

Stakeholders report a need for training for developing agency protocols and clarifying practice expectations for Family Assessment (FA) and traditional investigations, as well as providing ongoing feedback and supervision to staff regarding their work. They also report that worker turnover in the past, when there was only one assessment worker, negatively affected overall agency safety performance

Excerpts from the Band's Self Assessment. Timely contact with children is achieved with higher frequency during the school year. Factors that contribute to delays in initial contact with children are varied. Due to extreme poverty, many families do not have telephones or their telephones are unreliable. There is a high rate of homelessness, with many families living together. Families often have to move frequently between multiple relatives, making initial contact or determining the family's residence difficult. Often, when a residence is found, caregivers will not answer the door even though it is apparent that someone is home. Historical distrust and misconceptions about child protection contribute to the difficulty in making the initial contact. There is an ingrained fear that parents will lose their children if child protection becomes involved with their family.

The reservation surface area is 1,310 square miles, with 11 communities. The distance between communities makes response difficult when maltreatment reports originate in different communities. Prior to the past six months, there was only one assessment worker who responded to 221 assessments in a 12-month period.

Summary Observations of Safety Outcome 1. Timeliness of agency response to child maltreatment reports is an area needing improvement based on case review and broader child welfare performance data. Focusing improvement efforts on clarifying agency policy and supporting practice expectations for staff, as well as making timely contacts with children in response to all reports of child maltreatment, would support safety outcomes for children.

Safety Outcome 2: children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate

Outcome or Performance Item	Performance Item Ratings			Outcome Ratings			
	Strength	Area Needing Improvement	NA	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	NA
Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate				2	3	1	0
Item 3: Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal or re-entry into foster care	4	2	0				
Item 4: Risk assessment and safety management	2	4	0				

Case Review Findings

Item 3: Services to family to protect child(ren) in the home and prevent removal or re-entry into foster care. This item evaluated whether reasonable efforts were made to prevent removal of children from their homes, or re-entry after a reunification. In the three placement cases, rated as a Strength, the agency placed children in foster care on an emergency basis because there were no services that could ensure children's safety in the family home. In the one in-home case, the agency provided an array of placement prevention services for nine months, but the children were removed on an emergency basis due to safety concerns. Two cases were rated as Area Needing Improvement because the agency had opportunities to provide placement prevention services; however, services to address identified risk and safety concerns were not provided, which resulted in children being placed in foster care.

Item 4: Risk assessment and safety management. This item evaluated whether the agency made concerted efforts to assess and address the risk and safety concerns for children in their own homes or while in foster care. In the two cases rated as a Strength, caseworkers completed initial Structured Decision Making (SDM) risk and safety assessment tools, and assessed risk and safety during caseworker visits with children, foster parents and other service providers. In these cases, risk and safety concerns were addressed.

Cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement when underlying risk factors were only partially addressed. There was a lack of consistent caseworker visits, and maltreatment reports appearing to meet statutory criteria were either screened out or not fully assessed.

Child Welfare Data: Minnesota's Child Welfare Report, 2008 reflects that 30.5 percent of children who were discharged from placement in 2008 were in placement for less than eight days. This is higher than the state average of 24.8 percent (Appendix, Table 3). The agency may want to examine whether some of these entries might have been prevented, and what services were provided to support the families at discharge. The agency met the national standard related to child abuse and neglect in foster care (Appendix, Table 1).

Stakeholder Input. Stakeholders indicate that the agency makes appropriate efforts to prevent out-of-home placements by providing voluntary child welfare services to families. A Pre-placement Screening Team examines out-of-home placement requests, considers alternatives to placement, and tries to match children's needs with the skills of foster parents. Stakeholders report effective agency relationships with mandated reporters and tribal attorneys.

Excerpts from the Band's Self Assessment. The Leech Lake Band provides voluntary services whenever possible to prevent the need for placement or court involvement. The Family Preservation Treatment Team consists of a licensed mental health professional, family counselor, family skills worker, and therapeutic case manager. That team reviews requests for out-of-home placement and alternatives to placement. The Family Preservation Program offers culturally competent services designed to prevent out-of-home placement of children, and facilitates reunification of families that are currently experiencing out-of-home placement.

Summary Observations of Safety Outcome 2. In the cases reviewed, all of the children entered foster care on an emergency basis due to safety concerns. However, stakeholder and self-assessment data indicate that the agency works collaboratively with its community partners and families to prevent out-of-home placements by providing services. Further examination regarding whether some short-term placements could be prevented is warranted, and might be an opportunity to improve safety and permanency outcomes for children. Based on the case reviews, improvements are needed in the agency's responses to new maltreatment reports received on open cases to improve the quality of safety and risk assessments during caseworker visits at parents' and foster parents' homes.

Permanency findings

Permanency outcomes and performance items were rated only in placement cases. When reviewing placement cases, one child in the family was randomly selected as the "identified child" and performance items and outcomes were based on that child's experience.

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

Outcome or Performance Item	Performance Item Ratings			Outcome Ratings			
	Strength	Area Needing Improvement	NA	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	NA

		ment					
Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations				4	1	0	0
Item 5: Foster care re-entries	5	0	0				
Item 6: Stability of foster care placement	4	1	0				
Item 7: Permanency goal for child	5	0	0				
Item 8: Reunification or permanent transfer of legal and physical custody to a relative	4	1	0				
Item 9: Adoption	0	0	5				
Item 10: Long-term foster care	0	0	5				

Case Review Findings

Item 5: Foster care re-entries. Foster care re-entries evaluated the child's placement history, specifically whether any discharges from foster care were followed by a return to foster care for the same general reasons within 12 months. In the five cases rated as a Strength, the most recent placement was the child's sole entry into foster care; there was no re-entry.

Item 6: Stability of foster care placement. This item evaluated whether children experienced multiple placement settings during the period under review, and if so, whether the changes were necessary to achieve permanency or meet their needs, and whether the most recent placement setting was stable.

In a majority of the cases, children lived in two or fewer placement settings during the period under review; those placements were determined to be stable. One practice that supported placement stability was the effective use of relative placements. One case was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the child experienced unplanned placement disruptions not related to achieving her permanency goal.

Item 7: Permanency goal for child. This item evaluated whether the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for children in a timely manner. In all cases, the agency established timely permanency goals appropriately matched to children's needs and circumstances. Caseworker meetings with parents, allowing them to have input in establishing permanency goals and placement resources, supported positive findings.

Item 8: Reunification or permanent transfer of legal and physical custody to a relative. This item evaluated whether timely achievement of permanency occurred for children with goals of reunification or permanent transfer of legal and physical custody to a relative. In all of the cases reviewed, the children's permanency goal was reunification. In four cases, the goal was achieved, or there were plans to achieve the goal within 12 months of the children's entry into foster care. Practices that supported timely permanency included frequent court reviews, expedited services and the use of trial home visits (THV).

One case was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because there was a seven-month delay in starting therapy sessions for a child. These sessions were required to be completed before the child could be returned home. The court is conducting review hearings every 30 to 60 days to monitor the child's progress toward reunification, but it is unlikely the child will be reunited in 12 months or less.

Item 9: Adoption. Item 9 evaluated whether timely achievement of permanency occurred for children with a goal of adoption. There were no cases where adoption was the goal.

Item 10: Long-term foster care. This item evaluated whether timely achievement of permanency occurred for children with a permanency goal of long-term foster care. There were no cases where long-term foster care was the goal.

Child Welfare Data. The agency met national standards for timely reunification and placement stability, but did not meet the national standards for children meeting the Adoption and Safe Families Act time-in-care requirements for timeliness of adoptions and achieving permanency for children in foster care (Appendix, Table 1).

Stakeholder Input. Stakeholders report strong collaboration between the agency and stakeholders involved with the court system, including tribal legal counsel. As cases approach permanency, caseworkers consult with the Child Welfare Commission to discuss children's needs and review the most appropriate permanency options prior to the scheduled tribal court hearings. The recently-established Pre-placement Review Team offers caseworkers input on permanency goals, and helps match children to the most appropriate foster home able to meet their needs. Overall, stakeholders report caseworkers are able to develop and implement creative solutions to family needs.

Excerpts from the Band's Self Assessment. The tribal court reviews cases every 30-60 days to ensure that all possible services are provided to parents before allowing the agency to proceed to permanency. Tribal court is able to order a suspension of parental rights to allow the family to continue with contact and preserve the identity of Leech Lake Band members. Timelines are stressed, but less so in tribal court where extensions are granted more generously. The agency understands that sometimes families are well on their way to reunifying with their children; however, they will ask for an extension if the family needs a little longer than six months to prepare for a healthy reunification.

Summary Observations of Permanency Outcome 1. There was strong performance in this outcome area. The agency is committed to focusing their child welfare practices on reunification with parents, or transferring permanent and legal custody to relatives. The agency provided timely child welfare services that conformed to tribal customs and traditions for families living in the Leech Lake community.

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

Outcome or Performance Item	Performance Item Ratings	Outcome Ratings
-----------------------------	--------------------------	-----------------

	Strength	Area Needing Improvement	NA	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	NA
Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.				3	2	0	0
Item 11: Proximity of foster care placement	5	0	0				
Item 12: Placement with siblings	3	1	1				
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care	1	4	0				
Item 14: Preserving connections	3	2	0				
Item 15: Relative placement	5	0	0				
Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents	4	1	0				

Case Review Findings

Item 11: Proximity of foster care placement. This item evaluated whether a child's foster care setting was close to their parents or relatives, and the general accessibility of the child. In all the cases, children were placed in or near their home communities, which supported connections to parents, culture, extended family and schools.

Item 12: Placement with siblings. This item evaluated whether efforts were made by the agency to place siblings together in foster care, or the extent to which siblings were separated because their individual needs could be met only in separate placements. The agency recognized the importance of maintaining siblings together whenever possible or appropriate. The agency's use of relative foster homes also helps to support sibling placements and child connections to families.

One case was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because a child was placed about an hour away, separate from siblings, due to a lack of local resources.

Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care. This item evaluated whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to facilitate visitation between parents and their children, between siblings in foster care, and whether the frequency of visits was sufficient to meet the child's needs. The following chart identifies the most typical pattern of face-to-face visitation between children and their parents, and children and siblings placed separately in foster care:

In the one case rated as a Strength, the frequency and quality of the child's visits supported the relationship with his family, and helped support achievement of the permanency goal. Visits occurred daily. Overall, visitation practices were flexible, and often under the control and direction of the foster parents.

Four cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement because additional efforts were needed to assess and support the mother's and father's role in visitation. The case reviews further indicated that caseworkers respected family input by allowing them to take a lead role in visitation. However, there was a need for the agency to take a stronger leadership role in establishing written visitation plans; addressing barriers to frequent, quality visitation, and establishing standard visitation practice guidelines.

Item 14: Preserving connections. This item evaluated agency efforts to preserve important connections for children while in foster care. Important connections may include schools, religion, culture and extended family. In three cases rated as a Strength, relative placements contributed to maintaining children's connections to parents, extended family, siblings, school, and the tribal community.

In the two cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement, additional agency efforts were needed to support children's relationships with extended family members and siblings who were not in placement.

Item 15: Relative placement. This item evaluated agency efforts to locate and assess relatives, both maternal and paternal, as potential placement resources for children when they enter foster care. This was a strong area of agency practice. In four of the cases reviewed, children were placed with relatives and the placements were determined to be stable. In all cases, the agency immediately initiated maternal and paternal relative searches, and was able to move children from non-relative to relative foster homes in an effort to better meet children's needs.

Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents. This item evaluated agency efforts to promote and/or maintain the bond between the child and both parents while the child was in foster care. In four cases, caseworkers encouraged parents' participation in school meetings and medical appointments, and offered transportation to eliminate barriers to their participation. Foster care providers also mentored and supported parents, promoting positive relationships while the parents were in chemical dependency treatment.

In the one case rated as an Area Needing Improvement, there was a need for more agency involvement in addressing the reasons why the mother was resistant to being involved in her child's life.

Child Welfare Data: The Minnesota's Child Welfare Report, 2008, reflects that 25 percent of the agency's foster care placements were made with relatives, compared to a statewide average of 12.7 percent (Appendix, Table 4).

Stakeholder Input. Stakeholders report that the agency initiates timely and diligent relative searches, working with other tribal departments and communities to locate potential relative resources.

Excerpts from the Band's Self Assessment. Pre-placement screenings are used to ensure that tribal placements, relative placements, and kinship placements are being utilized fully before any other placement is considered for permanency. Relative searches are completed before any permanency is established with a non-relative.

Summary Observations of Permanency Outcome 2. Overall, the agency makes considerable efforts to preserve and maintain important relationships and connections for children. Practices related to joint sibling placements and placing children with relatives in tribally licensed foster homes support the continuity of family relationships for children. Improving the frequency and quality of parent/child visitation practices would further strengthen children's relationships and connections to their parents.

Well-Being findings

When evaluating Well-being performance items and outcomes, ratings were made in both placement and in-home cases. When reviewing in-home cases, all children in the family were considered; and, when reviewing placement cases, only the "identified child" was considered in the rating decision.

Well-being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs

Outcome or Performance Item	Performance Item Ratings			Outcome Ratings			
	Strength	Area Needing Improvement	NA	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	NA
Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs				1	3	2	0
Item 17: Needs and services of child, parents and foster parents	3	3	0				
Item 18: Child and family involvement in case planning	0	6	0				
Item 19: Worker visits with child	2	4	0				
Item 20: Worker visits with parent(s)	3	3	0				

Case Review Findings

Item 17: Needs and services of child, parents and foster parents. This item evaluated whether the needs of children, parents and foster parents were adequately assessed; and whether identified needs were addressed through appropriate services. The following table details the agency's performance on Item 17.

		Number of Cases:		
		Yes	No	NA
The safety, permanency and well-being needs of children, parents and foster parents were adequately assessed and identified:	Children:	4	2	
	Mothers:	4	1	1
	Fathers:	3	2	1
	Foster parents:	4	1	0
The identified needs of children, parents and foster parents were addressed through appropriate services:	Children:	2	1	3
	Mothers:	4	1	1
	Fathers:	3	1	2
	Foster parents:	3	1	1

Caseworkers used informal and formal assessments and their own observations during visits with families to assess the needs of children, parents, and foster parents. Strong practices included timely referrals for culturally sensitive chemical dependency assessment and treatment services, mental health services, transportation and in-home family preservation services.

Caseworkers assessed and addressed foster parents' needs through frequent telephone calls and regular visits with them.

Three cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement because of a lack of caseworker visits with children and parents, limiting agency staff's ability to assess initial and underlying family needs. Overall, practices were slightly more consistent with mothers than fathers; however, additional efforts were needed to assess the needs of all children in the family, and locate and assess the needs of the non-resident father.

Item 18: Child and family involvement in case planning. This item evaluated the agency's efforts to involve age-appropriate children, mothers and fathers in case planning activities to identify needs and services, establish goals and evaluate progress.

The following chart details information from the cases reviewed.

		Number of Cases:		
		Yes	No	NA
The agency made concerted efforts to involve the parents and children in case planning activities:	Children:	3	1	2
	Mothers:	2	3	1
	Fathers:	2	3	1
A current signed case plan was in the file:		2	4	0

For children age 16 and older in foster care, an Independent Living Skills plan was in the file:	0	0	6
--	---	---	---

All of the cases reviewed received an Area Needing Improvement rating. The case reviews indicated inconsistent agency practices in engaging parents and children in developing and reviewing case plans, including efforts to work jointly with families to identify strengths, needs and services. A majority of the cases lacked a current, signed case plan in the file, and there was some confusion as to what case plan format to use.

In one case, the use of a case-planning meeting with a family was an example of a promising practice that would improve performance on this item.

Item 19: Worker visits with child. This item evaluated whether the frequency of face-to-face visits between workers and children was consistent with the needs of the children, and whether visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery and goal attainment. In the two cases rated as a Strength, caseworkers met with children at least monthly, and the frequency and quality of visits were determined as meeting children's needs.

In the four cases rated as an Area Needing improvement, caseworker visits with children occurred less than monthly, and the frequency was not sufficient to assess and respond to children's needs. In some cases, there were significant time gaps between visits, and caseworkers did not have visits with children in their foster homes. Statute requires monthly face-to-face contacts with children in out-of-home placement, specifying that the majority of those visits must occur at the child's residence.

Item 20: Worker visits with parent(s). This item evaluated whether the frequency of face-to-face visits between the workers and children's parent(s) was consistent with the needs of the children, and whether visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery and goal attainment. The following chart provides detailed information on the frequency of worker face-to-face visits with parents in the cases reviewed.

Overall, practices were more consistent with mothers than fathers. When cases were rated a Strength, visits occurred monthly and were focused on case planning, services provided and goal attainment. Visitation practices were stronger with parents compared to children. Case reviews indicated caseworkers developed helping relationships with parents by being supportive and actively listening to them describe their needs.

Stakeholder Input. Stakeholders report that caseworker turnover and high caseload sizes negatively impacted case planning practices and time available to complete quality face-to-face visits with children, foster parents and families. Other stakeholders reported the need to receive more timely and comprehensive information regarding the needs and services available to support children living in foster care.

Excerpts from the Band's Self Assessment. A case plan is required of all children that are in out-of-home placement within 30 days of the placement date. The family is involved in developing the case plan based on their strengths, needs and resources. Case plans are reviewed on an on-going basis with the family to ensure that goals are met.

Summary Observations of Well-being Outcome 1. Inconsistent practices related to assessing needs, providing targeted services, engaging appropriate family members in case planning, and caseworker visits limited agency efforts to achieve well-being outcomes for children and families. Improvements are needed to ensure that all families have a current written case plan that is developed jointly with families and age appropriate children, and that the quality and frequency of visits matches the children's needs.

Well-being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs

Outcome or Performance Item	Performance Item Ratings			Outcome Ratings			
	Strength	Area Needing Improvement	NA	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	NA
Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs				5	0	0	1
Item 21: Educational needs of the child	5	0	1				

Case Review Findings

Item 21: Educational needs of the child. Item 21 evaluated whether children's educational needs were assessed, and whether appropriate services were provided to meet those needs. This was a strong area of performance during this review. In all of the applicable cases, children's educational needs were assessed and addressed. Caseworkers facilitated referrals for Head Start, Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) evaluations and services, and participated in school meetings.

Stakeholder Input. Stakeholders report good communication between local schools and agency caseworkers. However, caseworker turnover has negatively affected community efforts to address educational neglect and truancy issues. Truancy cases receive less agency time and attention compared to child protection cases.

Excerpts from the Band's Self Assessment Update. Promising approaches for the educational status of children include a close collaborative partnership between Leech Lake Child Welfare and area schools. Caseworkers work closely with schools to ensure that the cultural and emotional needs of Native American children and families are met. The agency recognizes the impact that boarding schools have had on the Native American community, and make every effort to communicate and educate school staff on historical trauma and intergenerational transmission.

Summary Observations of Well-being Outcome 2. Agency performance in this area was strong. Overall, according to the case reviews, children's educational needs were assessed and addressed.

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

Outcome or Performance Item	Performance Item Ratings			Outcome Ratings			
	Strength	Area Needing Improvement	NA	Substantially Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	NA
Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs				2	3	1	0
Item 22: Physical health of the child	4	2	0				
Item 23: Mental/behavioral health of the child	3	3	0				

Case Review Findings

Item 22: Physical health of the child. This item evaluated the agency's efforts to ensure that the medical and dental health needs of children were adequately assessed and met. In the majority of cases, the agency ensured that the physical and dental health needs of children were assessed, and appropriate services were provided to meet identified needs. In placement cases, foster parents took the lead in ensuring that children's physical health and dental needs were met.

Two cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement because initial medical or dental health examinations were not completed, or underlying medical care needs that warranted further attention were not fully assessed.

Item 23: Mental/behavioral health of the child. This item evaluated whether children's mental/behavioral health needs had been appropriately assessed, including the completion of required children's mental health screenings, and whether services designed to meet those needs were provided. In three cases rated as a Strength, the agency conducted initial and ongoing assessments of children's mental health needs and provided services to address them.

Three cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement because there were extensive delays in assessing children's mental health needs, or delays in connecting children to needed services.

Stakeholder Input. Stakeholders indicate that there is an array of child welfare services that conform to tribal customs for families living in the Leech Lake community. Others report there are sufficient medical and chemical health services locally, but there is a need for additional public transportation and mental and dental health services for children and families.

Excerpts from the Band's Self Assessment. The Leech Lake Child Welfare Program works collaboratively with children's mental health programs to coordinate mental health services for children. The therapeutic case manager works as a liaison between case managers and foster parents to help coordinate services for medically fragile and special needs children. The Child Welfare Program is currently exploring funding for a children's mental health program.

Summary Observations of Well-being Outcome 3. Overall, physical health needs of children were assessed, and appropriate services provided. Completing formal and informal mental health assessments in every case will support early identification of children's mental health needs and help inform case planning.

SYSTEMIC FACTORS

The self assessment completed by the Leech Lake Band provides descriptions and ratings on eight systemic factors that form the child welfare infrastructure. Each system was further examined during the onsite review. When the Band develops its Program Improvement Plan (PIP), they will consider how strong systems support their PIP activities, and include strategies to improve systemic factors that were determined as needing improvement.

The following systemic factor(s) contributed to positive case findings:

Case Review System: There is a well-developed court system focused on the safety, permanency and well-being needs of the Leech Lake Band's children and families. Court practices and policies support achievement of permanency, and case review findings indicate that the Leech Lake tribal court addresses permanency for children.

Foster and Adoptive Home Licensing, Approval and Recruitment: The agency continues to develop and build its capacity to provide foster homes that meet the individualized needs of children and support the customs and traditions of the tribe. For example, stakeholders and the self assessment report that the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe has started licensing therapeutic foster care homes. The goal is to meet children's therapeutic needs while providing placement resources in their tribal community. As more therapeutic homes are trained and licensed, more culturally appropriate services will be available to meet children's needs and improve connections with their tribe.

The following systemic factor(s) should be addressed in the development of the Leech Lake Band Program Improvement Plan:

Quality Assurance: The agency does not have a formal internal quality assurance system to monitor casework practice or measure outcomes. Developing an internal quality assurance system would assist the agency in evaluating whether program improvement activities resulted in improved outcomes for children and families.

Supervisor and Social Worker Resources: Findings from this review suggest that staff turnover and unmet training needs have negatively affected agency efforts to achieve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children and families. Enhancing these systems would support improved outcome performance.

PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Safety

Identify and address barriers to timely face-to-face contacts with children in maltreatment assessments and investigations. Ensure that face-to-face contacts occur within statutory timelines (MnCF SR Item 1).

Ensure that all maltreatment reports are screened, and those that meet criteria are assessed or investigated (MnCF SR Item 4).

Ensure quality and consistent safety and risk assessments are conducted through face-to-face caseworker visits with all children in foster care each month (MnCF SR Item 4).

Permanency

Develop strategies, practices and policies to ensure that frequent, quality parent/child visitation occurs (MnCF SR Item 13).

Well-being

Conduct comprehensive assessments of needs and provision of appropriate services for children, parents and foster parents (MnCF SR Item 17).

Assess training needs and implement strategies to engage appropriate family members in case planning. Ensure that all families are provided with a current signed case plan (MnCF SR Item 18).

Conduct caseworker visits with children at a frequency that meets their needs, ensuring that caseworker visits with children in foster care occur each and every month while they are in placement, and that the majority of visits occur in the child's residence (MnCF SR Item 19).

Systemic Factors

Findings from this review suggest that staff turnover and unmet training needs have negatively affected agency efforts to achieve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children and families. Enhancing these systems would support improved outcome performance.

Develop a quality assurance system to measure the effectiveness of Program Improvement Plan strategies and identify emerging needs.

APPENDIX

Federal Data Indicators

The following table summarizes the agency's performance on federal data indicators and provides a comparison to state performance rates.

In the first half of 2008, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Indian Child Welfare agency began entering data into SSIS for children served regarding reports and responses to child maltreatment concerns, out-of-home care and guardianship/adoption circumstances. Accessing SSIS for data documentation and entry purposes is a new tool for the Band, and the data covers only a portion of all 2008 data. Therefore, data should be considered preliminary and will become increasingly robust over time.

SUMMARY OF MN PERFORMANCE ON FEDERAL MEASURES	National Standard		MN Performance 2008	Leech Lake Band Performance 2008
Safety Indicator 1: Absence of Maltreatment Recurrence	94.6%	↑	94.86%	NA
Safety Indicator 2: Absence of CA/N in Foster Care	99.68%	↑	99.69%	100%* (114 / 114)
Permanency Composite 1: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification				
Component A: Timeliness of Reunification				
C1.1 Of all children discharged from foster care to reunification in the year shown, and who had been in foster care for eight days or longer, what percent were reunified in less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal from home?	75.2%	↑	86.1%	100%* (20 / 20)
C1.2 Median stay in foster care to reunification (months)	5.4	↓	3.98%	3.6*
C1.3 Of all children entering foster care for the first time in the six-month period just prior to the year shown, and who remained in foster care for eight days or longer, what percentage were reunified in less than 12 months?	48.4%	↑	62%	0% (0 / 3)
Component B: Permanency of Reunification				
C1.4 Of all children discharged from care to reunification in the 12-month period prior to the year shown, what percentage re-entered foster care in less than 12 months from the date of discharge?	9.9%	↓	26.1%	0%* (0 / 2)
Permanency Composite 2: Timeliness of Adoptions				
Component A: Timeliness of Adoptions of Children Discharged From Foster Care				
C2.1 Of all children who were discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption in the year shown, what percent were discharged in less than 24 months from the date of latest removal from home?	36.6%	↑	50.3%	NA
C2.2 Of all children who were discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption in the year shown, what was the median length of stay in foster care (in months) from the date of latest removed from home to the date of adoption?	27.3	↓	25.13%	NA
Component B: Adoption for Children Meeting ASFA Time-In-Care Requirements				
C2.3 Of all children in foster care on the first day of the year shown	22.7%	↑	21%	0%

who were in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer (and who, by the last day of the year shown, were not discharged from foster care with a discharge reason of live with relative, reunify or guardianship), what percent were discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption by the last day of the year shown?				(0 / 2)
C2.4 Of all children in foster care on the first day of the year shown who were in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer, and were not legally free for adoption prior to that day, what percent become legally free for adoption during the first six months of the year shown?	10.9%	↑	2.1%	0% (0 / 2)
Component C: Adoption of Children Who Are Legally Free for Adoption				
C2.5 Of all children who became legally free for adoption in the 12-month period prior to the year shown, what percent were discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption in less than 12 months of becoming legally free?	53.7%	↑	34.6%	NA
Permanency Composite 3: Achieving Permanency for Children in Foster Care				
Component A: Achieving permanency for Children in Care for Extended Periods of Time				
C3.1 Of all children in foster care for 24 months or longer on the first day of the year shown, what percent were discharged to a permanency home prior to their 18th birthday and by the end of the year? (Including adoption, guardianship, reunification or transfer of custody to a relative.)	29.1%	↑	18.8%	0% (0 / 2)
C3.2 Of all children who were discharged from foster care in the year shown, and who were legally free for adoption at the time of discharge, what percent were discharged to a permanent home prior to their 18th birthday (including adoption, guardianship, reunification or transfer of custody to a relative)?	98.0%	↑	93.4%	NA
Component B: Children Emancipated Who Were in Foster Care for Extended Periods Of Time				
C3.3 Of all children who, during the year shown, either (1) were discharged from foster care prior to age 18 with a discharge reason of emancipation , or (2) reached their 18th birthday while in foster care, what percent were in foster care for three years or longer?	37.5%	↓	43.5%	NA
Permanency Composite 4: Placement Stability (no components)				
C4.1 Of all children served in foster care during the year shown who were in foster care for at least eight days but less than 12 months, what percent had two or fewer placement settings?	86.0%	↑	86.1%	89.7%* (87 / 97)
C4.2 Of all children served in foster care during the year shown who were in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months, what percent had two or fewer placement settings?	65.4%	↑	55.4%	100%* (3 / 3)
C4.3 Of all children served in foster care during the year shown who were in foster care for at least 24 months, what percent had two or fewer placement settings?	41.8%	↑	30.4%	100%* (3 / 3)

*The Band met the national standard.

Completed Face-to-face Contact with Alleged Child Victims

Table 2

	Reporting Period	Total all Child Subjects	Percent With Timely Contact*	Percent With No Contact	Statewide Rate of Timely Contact
Family Assessments and Investigations – Not Substantial Child Endangerment	Jan-June 2009	66	33.3%	42.4%	69.5%
Investigations – Alleged Substantial Child Endangerment	Jan-June 2009	6	16.7%	16.7%	57.3%

DHS Timeliness to Child Contact 2009 Report

*Timely contact is defined as:

Family Assessments and Investigation – Not Substantial Child Endangerment: Within five calendar days of receipt of report

Investigation – Alleged Substantial Child Endangerment: Immediately/within 24 hours of receipt of report.

Length of Placement Episodes Ending in 2008

Table 3

Length of Placement Episodes	2008	
	State %	Band %
1 – 7 days	24.8%	30.5% (11 / 36)
8 – 30 days	10.6%	19.4% (7 / 36)
31 – 90 days	13.4%	NA
91 – 180 days	11.2%	30.5% (11 / 36)
181 – 365 days	15.9%	19.4% (7 / 36)
366+ days	24.7%	NA

DHS Children's Research and Evaluation
 Children in Out-of-home Care by Placement Setting
 (Children may be counted in more than one placement setting)

Table 4

Placement Setting	2008	
	State %	Band %
Foster Family Non-relative	38.7%	66.3%
Foster Family Relative	12.7%	25%
Foster Home – Corporate/Shift Staff	1.3%	0.6%
Group Home	11.6%	1.9%
Juvenile Correctional Facility (locked)	3.5%	0%
Juvenile Correctional Facility (non-secure)	6.7%	2.5%
Pre-adoptive Non-relative	4.2%	1.3%
Pre-adoptive Relative	2.0%	0.6%
Residential Treatment Center	19.1%	1.9%
Other*	0.2%	0%
Total Placement Settings	22, 947	160

**Other* includes ICF-MR and Supervised Independent Living settings

Minnesota's Child Welfare Report, 2008

MnCF SR Outcomes and Items Performance Ratings

The following table summarizes the review findings for Leech Lake Band outcomes and performance items.

OUTCOME AND PERFORMANCE ITEMS		% Substantially Achieved	% Strength
SAFETY OUTCOME 1	Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect	50% (3 / 6)	
ITEM 1	Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment		50% (3 / 6)
ITEM 2	Repeat maltreatment		83.3% (5 / 6)
SAFETY OUTCOME 2	Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate	33.3% (2 / 6)	
ITEM 3	Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal or re-entry into foster care		66.7% (4 / 6)
ITEM 4	Risk assessment and safety management		33.3% (2 / 6)

PERMANENCY OUTCOME 1	Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	80% (4 / 5)	
ITEM 5	Foster care re-entries		100% (5 / 5)
ITEM 6	Stability of foster care placement		80% (4 / 5)
ITEM 7	Permanency goal for child		100% (5 / 5)
ITEM 8	Reunification or transfer of permanent legal and physical custody to a relative		80% (4 / 5)
ITEM 9	Adoption		NA
ITEM 10	Permanency goal of long-term foster care		NA
PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2	The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children	60% (3 / 5)	
ITEM 11	Proximity of foster care placement		100% (5 / 5)
ITEM 12	Placement with siblings		75% (3 / 4)
ITEM 13	Visits with parents and siblings in foster care		20% (1 / 5)
ITEM 14	Preservation of connections		60% (3 / 5)
ITEM 15	Relative placement		100% (5 / 5)
ITEM 16	Relationship of child in care with parents		80% (4 / 5)
WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1	Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs	16.7% (1 / 6)	
ITEM 17	Needs and services of child, parents and foster parents		50% (3 / 6)
ITEM 18	Child and family involvement in case planning		0% (0 / 6)
ITEM 19	Worker visits with child		33.3% (2 / 4)
ITEM 20	Worker visits with parent(s)		50% (3 / 6)
WELL-BEING OUTCOME 2	Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs	100% (5 / 5)	
ITEM 21	Educational needs of the child		100% (5 / 5)
WELL-BEING OUTCOME 3	Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs	16.7% (1 / 6)	
ITEM 22	Physical health of the child		66.7% (4 / 6)
ITEM 23	Mental/behavioral health of the child		50% (3 / 6)