

# Evaluating Minnesota's Child Welfare System:

## A Review of Safety, Permanency and Well-being Outcomes for Children and Families in the White Earth Band of Ojibwe

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### Executive Summary

Through the American Indian Child Welfare Initiative (AICWI), DHS and the White Earth Band of Ojibwe (Band) began working together in 2006 to accomplish the following goals:

Build tribal child welfare service delivery capacity

Deliver full continuum of child welfare services

Demonstrate tribal leadership and management of child welfare programs 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, and 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, 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 December 2008 marking the fully operationalized AICWI for the White Earth Band of Ojibwe.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) conducted a Minnesota Child and Family Service Review (MnCF SR) of the child welfare system of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe in August 2009, less than a year from the time the Band had assumed responsibility for the full continuum of child welfare services. The MnCF SR 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 White Earth 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 MnCF SR identified strengths and areas needing improvement in child welfare practice and systems in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being. Findings from the White Earth Band of Ojibwe, MnCF SR, identified many areas of strength in practice and in overall systems, and other areas where program improvements will be necessary. Overall, findings from the White Earth Band of Ojibwe were comparable and consistent with statewide findings from MnCF SR's conducted in 87 counties across the state of Minnesota over the past six years.

### Summary of Review Process

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

The White Earth Band of Ojibwe Indian Child Welfare agency partially 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 MnCF SR further examined 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 Sept. 18, 2009. State Quality Assurance consultants partnered with White Earth Indian Child Welfare staff to conduct the case reviews. Six Initiative eligible, non-county transfer cases were reviewed, including four

placement and two non-placement cases. 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. Fifteen separate stakeholder interviews were conducted, including the following individuals and/or groups: Indian Child Welfare (ICW) caseworkers (assessment, ongoing, foster care and customary adoption program staff); a community leader; Judicial Services director; tribal court judge; tribal attorney; foster and adoptive parents; school interventionists; staff from Dream Catcher Homes; the Wellbriety Center; Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder program; White Earth Substance Abuse; White Earth Home Health; and White Earth Mental Health. White Earth licensed foster parents also provided input through a written survey. Additionally, DHS Quality Assurance consultants observed the Band's Family Dependency Treatment Court staffing and court hearing at the judge's invitation.

### **Summary of Review Findings**

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. White Earth Band of Ojibwe had the strongest findings in Safety Outcome 2 (Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate), Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations), and Well-being Outcome 2 (Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs).

Outcome areas and performance items rated as needing improvement included Permanency Outcome 2 (The continuity of family relationships is preserved for children), Well-being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs), and Well-being Outcome 3 (Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs).

### **Key Findings**

Key findings based on data from case reviews, interviews with stakeholders and analysis of relevant child welfare data include:

#### **Safety Findings**

The agency has developed an efficient system for receiving and screening child protection reports in a timely manner.

Timely response to child maltreatment reports is an area needing improvement based on the case review findings, and overall performance in the first two quarters of 2009.

The child protection assessment and investigation process is relatively new for the White Earth Band of Ojibwe. A number of procedural issues were identified through the case review and stakeholder interviews.

The agency met both federal safety data indicators; there were no examples of repeat maltreatment in the cases reviewed.

The agency places a clear priority on child safety. Overall, case review findings were positive and reflected agency efforts to keep children in their family homes when possible, and to address immediate risk and safety concerns.

#### **Permanency Findings**

Case review findings and performance on federal data indicators reflect strong practices in maintaining children in stable placements, establishing appropriate permanency goals, and achieving permanency in a timely manner.

Agency efforts to place children with relatives or kin, place children in tribal foster homes in the White Earth community, and facilitate visitation between children and their mothers were effective in maintaining children's relationships and connections. Practices to promote, support and maintain father/child relationships and engage fathers in visitation with their children were inconsistent.

#### **Well-being Findings**

Casework practices related to assessing needs, providing services, and engaging family members in the development of case plans were inconsistent. Practice was less consistent with children and fathers than mothers.

Agency caseworkers had frequent, quality face-to-face contact with children, which is a critical component to achieving positive outcomes.

The agency is attentive to assessing and meeting children's educational needs.

The agency did not make consistent efforts to ensure that the physical and dental health needs of children in foster care were assessed and addressed.

#### **Systemic Factors:**

The agency and court work cooperatively to achieve timely permanency for children. Family Dependency Treatment Court has enhanced the court's and community's ability to address the needs of substance using parents and permanency for their children. There is a wide array of culturally-based services available in the White Earth community to meet the needs of children and families served through the child welfare system.

The agency collaborates with other local service providers to identify and address system-level issues. Exploring ways for additional communication/coordination on a case-level would help to ensure family's needs are met and there is no duplication of services.

The agency has a number of quality assurance practices in place, including team decision-making processes and supervisory reviews of casework. Expansion of those practices may be necessary to monitor progress on the Program Improvement Plan.

#### **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 White Earth 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. The Band should be encouraged that the review recognized systemic strengths and areas of child welfare practice that will provide a strong foundation for planning for program improvements designed 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](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.				2	1	1	2
Item 1: Timeliness of initiating assessments/ investigations of reports of child maltreatment	2	2	2				
Item 2: Repeat maltreatment	3	0	3				

### 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. In the cases reviewed, the agency screened the majority of child maltreatment reports within 24 hours of receipt. In two cases, the agency had face-to-face contact with children within required time frames. In the other two cases, face-to-face contact was not made within required time frames. Delays occurred when responding to both substantial child endangerment and non-substantial child endangerment reports, and included a case involving a report of educational neglect assigned to an educational neglect worker versus a child protection worker. Educational neglect is included in the definition of neglect in M.S. 626.556, and requires a child protection response.

In one case, reviewers noted that the agency had screened out a child protection report after conducting an interview with the child. Interviewing a child constitutes initiation of an investigation or assessment, and completion of all investigation or assessment activities is required.

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. There were no examples of repeat maltreatment in the cases reviewed.

Child Welfare Data: The department's Timeliness to Child Contact Report for the first two quarters of 2009 measures the timeliness of the agency's responses to all reports accepted for assessment or investigation. From January through June 2009, the agency made timely face-to-face contacts with 100 percent of children who were subjects of a report alleging substantial child endangerment (SCE), requiring a response within 24 hours, and 49.4 percent of children who were subjects of a report that did not include allegations of SCE requiring a response within five days. The agency's performance was higher than statewide performance for reports alleging SCE, and lower than statewide performance for reports not alleging SCE (Appendix, Table 2).

In 2008 the Band met both federal safety indicators – absence of maltreatment recurrence, and absence of child abuse and neglect in foster care (Appendix, Table 1).

Stakeholder Input. Stakeholders report that the agency makes consistent attempts to conduct face-to-face contacts with children within required time frames. They indicate that an inability to locate children and families is a barrier to timely contact.

They relay that the reporting process is clear. The agency has a designated intake staff, and stakeholders know who to contact to make a child protection report. They indicate that the agency is responsive to intake calls, and reports are screened on a daily basis. Stakeholders are not familiar with agency screening criteria and would appreciate additional information on what specific factors the agency considers when deciding whether to respond to a particular report. They indicate that screening decisions are not consistently based on child safety/maltreatment issues, but rather on parents and their needs.

Stakeholders also note that mandated reporters do not consistently receive information from the agency regarding screening decisions or results of assessments or investigations. Some indicate that concerns regarding confidentiality prevent the agency from providing such information to mandated reporters. They also express concern that confidential reporter's names are released in court petitions filed by the agency.

Stakeholders report that agency staff would appreciate additional technical assistance on screening and assessment practices. Excerpts from the Band's Self Assessment. The agency screens child protection reports daily in a team meeting involving the director and intake and assessment workers. Child protection assessments are initiated right away, but are kept open for up to 45 days to mitigate issues without needing to open an ongoing case management case.

Summary Observations of Safety Outcome 1. The agency has an efficient system for receiving and screening child protection reports in a timely manner; most reports were screened within 24 hours of receipt. Timely response to child maltreatment reports is an area needing improvement based on the case review findings and overall performance in the first two quarters of 2009. Conducting child protection Family Assessments and investigations is a relatively new process for the White Earth Band of Ojibwe, and a number of procedural issues were identified through the case review and stakeholder interviews. The agency may want to consider requesting additional technical assistance from the department to review screening and assessment/ investigation requirements and procedures, including:

Screening practices:

Developing written screening criteria

Educating stakeholders on criteria and assessment/investigation procedures

Assessment/investigation practices:

Clarifying what constitutes initiation of an assessment or investigation

Responding to educational neglect reports

Providing feedback to mandated reporters.

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				5	0	1	0
Item 3: Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal or re-entry into foster care	5	0	1				
Item 4: Risk assessment and safety management	5	1	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. One case was not applicable because there were no child safety issues identified. In the in-home cases, the agency provided placement prevention services to safely maintain children in their homes.

In each of the placement cases reviewed, children entered foster care on an emergency basis due to safety concerns. In one case, the agency facilitated a transfer of custody to a non-custodial father prior to the child entering 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 majority of cases reviewed, caseworkers assessed risk and safety issues for children through the completion of Structured Decision Making (SDM) risk and safety assessment and re-assessment tools, both initially and on an ongoing basis. Additionally, caseworkers assessed risk and safety through regular contact with children, parents and service providers. In all of the cases reviewed, safety concerns were managed through placement of children in foster care and/or provision of services targeted to address identified safety concerns. One case was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because allegations received by the agency were not formally assessed or investigated.

Child Welfare Data: Data from DHS' Children's Research, Planning and Evaluation reflects that 12.5 percent of children who entered placement in 2008 were returned home in less than eight days. This is lower than the state average of 24.8 percent (Appendix, Table 3).

Stakeholder Input. Stakeholders provide mixed feedback regarding the agency's efforts to prevent placement. Those more familiar with the agency and its day-to-day activities indicate that the agency provides extensive, culturally-based placement prevention services geared to maintaining children safely in their homes. They report that decisions to place children are team decisions that involve caseworkers, the ICW director and attorney. Stakeholders who may be less familiar with agency policies and procedures report concerns that placement decisions are not based on child safety, but rather on parent needs, particularly parents using alcohol or other drugs.

A number of stakeholders interviewed participate on the Band's Child Protection Team. They indicate that team meetings provide opportunities for case-specific discussion and information sharing.

Excerpts from the Band's Self Assessment. Child protection assessment workers use SDM tools in their decision making.

Ongoing case managers also use SDM tools to affirm their identification of family needs. The agency identified that SDM tools are not always culturally appropriate, and this presents a barrier to using them.

The Band has a Child Protection Team that includes representatives from local schools and the following tribal agencies: Indian Child Welfare, court, police department, mental health and home health. Team meetings provide members with an open environment for discussing safety concerns for specific youth, and also assist ICW to identify youth at risk.

Summary Observations of Safety Outcome 2. The agency places a clear priority on child safety. Overall, case review findings were positive and reflected agency efforts to keep children in their family homes when possible, and address immediate risk and

safety concerns. Additional education of community stakeholders regarding agency practices related to child placement may be beneficial.

### 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
Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations				4	0	0	0
Item 5: Foster care re-entries	3	0	1				
Item 6: Stability of foster care placement	4	0	0				
Item 7: Permanency goal for child	4	0	0				
Item 8: Reunification or permanent transfer of legal and physical custody to a relative	4	0	0				
Item 9: Adoption	1	0	3				
Item 10: Long-term foster care	0	0	4				

#### 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 each of the cases reviewed, the child’s most recent entry into out-of-home placement was their sole entry, and there were no examples of foster care 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. All applicable cases were rated as a Strength. In two cases, children were in only one placement setting during the period under review; and in the other two cases, children were in two placement settings. All moves from one setting to another were planned and reflected agency efforts to achieve case goals, e.g., move from a non-relative to a relative foster home. In some cases, the agency provided services to foster parents and children to help maintain placement stability.

Item 7: Permanency goal for child. This item evaluated whether the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for children in a timely manner. All applicable cases were rated as a Strength. In all of the cases reviewed, the agency established appropriate permanency goals within 30 days of a child’s entry into out-of-home placement, and goals were recorded in the case file – typically in the out-of-home placement plan. Caseworkers described a teaming process for establishing goals, including staffing cases with the agency director, legal counsel and fellow staff members.

In one case, the child met Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) time in care requirements for filing of a termination/suspension of parental rights petition. The agency had requested that the court find compelling reasons for not pursuing suspension of parental rights, and the court did make a finding that suspension of parental rights and adoption would not be in the child’s best interest.

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 cases reviewed, children had a permanency goal of reunification. All cases were rated as a Strength, and the agency and court had made, or were making, efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner. Such efforts included provision of services specifically targeted at addressing the circumstances that led to children’s placement, timely and frequent court reviews (often every 30 to 60 days), and use of trial home visits (THV). In one case, the accountability and support provided to a parent through Family Dependency Treatment Court were critical contributors to the child’s reunification.

Item 9: Adoption. Item 9 evaluated whether timely achievement of permanency occurred for children with a goal of adoption. In the one case where the child had a permanency goal of adoption, the agency and court were making efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner. The child had been in placement for five months, and the court had relieved the agency of the responsibility to provide services to achieve reunification. The agency had initiated action for suspension of parental rights, and the child was placed in a tribally licensed home with foster parents who were willing to be a permanency resource for the child.

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. This item was Not Applicable because no children in the cases reviewed had permanency goals of long-term foster care.

Child Welfare Data: The agency met the national standards for foster care stability; timeliness of reunification for children discharged from foster care in 2008; timeliness of adoptions for children whose adoptions were finalized in 2008; and children who met ASFA time-in-care requirements. The agency did not meet the national standards for legally freeing children for adoption in a timely manner or timely adoption of children who were legally free for adoption (Appendix, Table 1).

Stakeholder Input. Stakeholders indicate that the agency and court pay close attention to permanency timelines. They describe utilization of a team, or wraparound approach, as well as occasional use of Family Group Decision Making (FGDM), to establish permanency goals.

Stakeholders report that the Band follows state requirements for filing permanency petitions and establishing permanency. The court holds frequent reviews to monitor progress towards permanency, which was evidenced in the cases reviewed. All permanency options (transfer of custody to relatives, adoption and long-term foster care) are considered by the agency and court. Stakeholders indicate that transfer of custody is the most preferred permanency goal; however, the disparity between foster care per diems and relative custody assistance can be a barrier. Some stakeholders report that long-term foster care is seldom recommended, while others indicate that, due to high numbers of special needs children, there are a number of children in long-term foster care. Stakeholders also provided reviewers with information regarding the Band's suspension of parental rights (SPR) and adoption proceedings. Based on statistics provided by the court, SPR and adoption is a permanency option that is being utilized more frequently.

Excerpts from the Band's Self Assessment. The agency makes efforts to support stable placements in a number of ways, including placing children predominantly with relatives or kin; matching children with providers who can meet their needs; frequent contact with foster care providers; and providing training for foster parents.

The Band's self assessment described a number of active efforts to achieve timely permanency, including: developing specific and individualized case plans, frequent parent/child visitation, early identification of relative caregivers, timely filing of permanency petitions with the court, frequent court reviews that contribute to strong judicial oversight, and frequent supervisory review of cases.

Summary Observations of Permanency Outcome 1. All cases were rated as substantially achieved in this outcome area. Case review findings, stakeholder interviews, and performance on federal data indicators reflect strong agency and court practices designed to maintain children in stable placements, establish appropriate permanency goals, and achieve permanency in a timely manner.

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.				1	3	0	0
Item 11: Proximity of foster care placement	4	0	0				
Item 12: Placement with siblings	0	1	3				
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care	2	2	0				
Item 14: Preserving connections	3	1	0				
Item 15: Relative placement	3	1	0				
Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents	2	2	0				

#### Case Review Findings

Item 11: Proximity of foster care placement. This item evaluated whether the child's foster care setting was close to their parents or relatives, and the general accessibility of the child. All placement cases were rated as a Strength because children were placed in close proximity to their parents.

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. One case was reviewed in which a sibling group was in placement. The case was noted as needing improvement because there was not a clear reason or need for the siblings' placement in separate foster homes.

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 and between siblings in foster care, and whether the frequency of visits was sufficient to meet the child's needs. In all cases reviewed, the agency established plans for mother/child visitation that was consistent with meeting children's needs. In a number of cases, the agency offered and/or provided transportation for parents to reduce barriers to visitation. Additional efforts were needed to facilitate visits between non-resident fathers and their children and siblings placed in separate foster homes.

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. Placing children in tribally licensed foster homes in the White Earth community and facilitating visits with extended family members were key strategies for maintaining connections. In one case, additional efforts were needed to facilitate visits between a child in foster care and their sibling who was 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. A child was placed with a relative in one of the cases reviewed. In the majority of the remaining cases, the agency conducted timely searches of both maternal and paternal relatives.

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. The agency's efforts to promote and maintain the parent/child bond were more consistent with mothers than fathers. Examples included the agency encouraging mothers' participation in medical and school appointments, and making arrangements for children to reside with their mothers in chemical dependency treatment facilities. A lack of efforts to promote father's relationships with their children resulted in ratings of Area Needing Improvement.

Child Welfare Data: Minnesota's Child Welfare Report, 2008 shows that the White Earth Band placed children in foster care with relatives at a higher rate (22.7 percent) than the state average of 12.7 percent (Appendix, Table 3).

Stakeholder Input. Stakeholders speak positively about the agency's efforts to identify, locate, and evaluate relatives or kin as potential placement options for children. They indicate that relative searches are timely, often beginning at the time of assessment/investigation, and thorough, resulting in a high percentage of relative/kin placements. Stakeholders have mixed observations regarding the agency's efforts to locate, assess and engage non-custodial parents, typically fathers. Some indicate that efforts are always made to locate them; others indicate that fathers are commonly excluded.

Stakeholders indicate that agency efforts to facilitate parent/child visitation are inconsistent, and that the frequency of visitation is often insufficient. There are commonly delays in arranging the first visit after a child has been placed out of the home. They note that barriers, such as transportation, can make it difficult to arrange visitation.

They report that decisions regarding whether visits will be supervised or unsupervised are made on a case-by-case basis. They also state that ICW requires parents to complete a urinalysis test prior to each visit. However, a positive result does not result in an automatic cancellation of the visit.

Excerpts from the Band's Self Assessment. The agency places children predominantly with relatives or kin, and arranges frequent parent/child visitation. In an effort to preserve children's connections to their parents, contact agreements between biological parents and "permanent" caregivers are always completed in adoption situations. The agency also provides cultural training for children.

Summary Observations of Permanency Outcome 2. Practices to preserve the continuity of family relationships and connections for children were inconsistent. Agency efforts to place children with relatives or kin, place children in tribal foster homes in the White Earth community, and facilitate visitation between children and their mothers supported achievement of outcomes.

Developing strategies to assess and engage fathers in visitation with their children, when appropriate, would promote the agency's other efforts in this area.

### 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				2	4	0	0
Item 17: Needs and services of child, parents and foster parents	2	4	0				
Item 18: Child and family involvement in case planning	4	2	0				
Item 19: Worker visits with child	6	0	0				
Item 20: Worker visits with parent(s)	5	1	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:	6	0	
	Mothers:	6	0	0
	Fathers:	3	2	1

	Foster parents:	4	0	0
The identified needs of children, parents and foster parents were addressed through appropriate services:	Children:	1	2	3
	Mothers:	6	0	0
	Fathers:	1	1	4
	Foster parents:	2	0	2

Casework practices related to assessing needs and providing services to children, parents and foster parents were inconsistent; fathers were least likely to be involved in assessments and services.

**Assessing Needs:** The agency consistently assessed mother's, children's and foster parents' needs. Caseworkers routinely completed Child Well-being tools and SDM family strengths and needs tools to assess needs. Other formal assessments, e.g., chemical dependency evaluations and capacity to parent evaluations, were also arranged by the agency. Ongoing assessments were completed during worker contact with children, parents, foster parents and service providers. Additional efforts to identify, locate, and assess the appropriateness of fathers' involvement were needed.

**Providing Services:** The agency arranged for a variety of services to address identified needs, particularly for mothers, most commonly chemical dependency treatment and aftercare. A number of parents interviewed identified that, through participation in services, they were able to re-connect to their culture and traditions. Cases were rated as Area Needing Improvement when needed services were not provided, or there was a delay in arranging services. In one case, the agency had placement authority and responsibility for children, but did not license the relatives with whom the children were residing.

**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:	1	1	4
	Mothers:	6	0	0
	Fathers:	2	1	3
A current/written case plan was in the file:		6	0	0
For children age 16 and older in foster care, an Independent Living Skills plan was in the file:		0	0	6

The agency's efforts to engage family members in case planning activities were inconsistent, particularly with age-appropriate children and fathers. In some cases, workers held specific case planning meetings with families and solicited their input on strengths, needs, goals and services. There were current, signed case plans in all of the cases reviewed.

Cases were rated as needing improvement when appropriate family members were not engaged in developing and reviewing the case plan.

**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. All cases were rated as a Strength because workers were visiting with children at a frequency that was consistent with meeting their needs. In the majority of cases, visits were occurring at least monthly, and more often when needed. Visits were high-quality, and included caseworkers spending individual time with children and observing parent/child interactions to assess risk, safety and overall needs. In a number of cases, however, reviewers noted that documentation was not consistent with information learned during case-related interviews regarding the frequency of caseworker visits.

**Item 20: Worker visits with parent(s).** This item evaluated whether the frequency of face-to-face visits between 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. Overall, caseworkers' visits with parents occurred at a frequency that was consistent with meeting case plan goals, and were focused on achieving case goals. Visits with mothers occurred more consistently than with fathers, ranging from three times a week to monthly.

**Stakeholder Input.** Stakeholders describe a variety of services available in the White Earth community to meet the needs of children and families. They acknowledge that caseworkers have large caseloads; however, they indicate a desire for increased coordination and collaboration with ICW to ensure that identified needs are met. Some report that the agency is less likely to engage fathers, particularly non-resident fathers, than mothers in services.

Some stakeholders indicate that case plans are developed in conjunction with families, and plans are individualized to meet specific family needs. Most stakeholders interviewed did not have information on the frequency of caseworker visits with children and parents; however, some indicate that visits occur monthly.

**Excerpts from the Band's Self Assessment.** Caseworkers are required to meet with parents within 30 days of case assignment and develop the initial case plan within that same time frame. Case plans are individualized and are broken down into immediate needs and long-term goals. Caseworkers are required to have face-to-face visits with children at least once a month.

**Summary Observations of Well-being Outcome 1.** Agency practices related to assessing needs, providing services, and engaging family members in the development of case plans were inconsistent. Practice was less consistent with children and fathers than mothers. Frequent, quality caseworker visits with children are a critical component to achieving positive outcomes. The agency

demonstrated strong and consistent practice in that area.

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. Agency caseworkers assessed children’s educational needs and helped to ensure that identified needs were addressed. Case examples included caseworkers attending school meetings, referring children for Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services, and consideration of educational needs in case planning. Stakeholder Input. Stakeholders report that agency caseworkers and the court pay close attention to children’s educational needs. They indicate that truancy is a significant issue in the community. Agency staff participates on local Student Attendance Teams (SAT), and educational neglect workers consult with school personnel regularly.

Excerpts from Band Self Assessment. The self assessment does not include information regarding meeting the educational needs of children.

Summary Observations of Well-being Outcome 2. Performance in this outcome area was strong. Information obtained from case reviews and stakeholders indicates that the agency is attentive to assessing and meeting children’s educational needs.

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	0	3	1
Item 22: Physical health of the child	1	3	2				
Item 23: Mental/behavioral health of the child	2	1	3				

**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. The agency’s efforts to meet the physical health needs of children in foster care were inconsistent. A number of the cases reviewed involved children with significant medical needs. In the majority of cases, children’s physical and/or dental health needs were not adequately assessed; needed services were not provided.

Item 23: Mental/behavioral health of the child. This item evaluated whether children’s mental/behavioral health needs had been appropriately assessed, and whether services designed to meet those needs were provided. In most of the applicable cases, children’s mental health needs were formally or informally assessed; no needs for mental health services were identified. Formal assessments included Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

(FASD) screenings at a local clinic. In one case, there was a recommendation for a full evaluation, and that had not occurred.

Stakeholder Input. Stakeholders report that, in general, there are adequate medical services available in the White Earth community to meet the identified needs of children. They indicate that mental health services are less accessible. Overall, they report that increased collaboration between ICW and service providers (medical and mental health) would be beneficial to ensure that children’s needs are met. Stakeholders also indicate that it can be challenging to obtain Medical Assistance for a child, and sometimes foster parents get billed for medical services.

Excerpts from the Band’s Self Assessment. The self assessment does not include information related to meeting the physical health needs of children, and limited information regarding addressing children’s mental health needs. The self assessment does indicate that children in out-of-home placement are quickly linked to mental health services.

Summary Observations of Well-being Outcome 3. The agency’s efforts to assess and address the physical and dental health needs of children in foster care were inconsistent.

**SYSTEMIC FACTORS**

The self assessment completed by the White Earth Indian Child Welfare agency provides descriptions and ratings on eight systemic factors that form the child welfare infrastructure. Each system was further examined during the onsite review. Although information about systems is included in the case review findings, summary observations of key findings are listed below.

Case Review System. Case review findings reflect that White Earth tribal court effectively addresses permanency for children. The court is clearly focused on children and family issues, and holds frequent review hearings to monitor case progress. Stakeholders

described the court process as inclusive, with extended family and foster parents being invited to participate. Some stakeholders indicate that foster parents do not consistently receive notices of court hearings. The court may want to consider formalizing that notification process. Family Dependency Treatment Court has enhanced the court's and community's ability to address the needs of substance using parents and permanency for their children.

**Service Array and Resource Development.** Quality Assurance consultants had the opportunity to meet with and interview a wide variety of service providers during the onsite review. There is a wide array of culturally-based services available in the White Earth community, including chemical dependency services (outpatient, inpatient and aftercare), mental health services, home health and other medical services; parenting support and education; and a supportive housing program for families who have experienced homelessness. Stakeholders indicated that many services were funded initially through grants, but providers actively pursue sustainable funding to ensure continued availability of services.

**Agency Responsiveness to the Community.** The agency has a multi-disciplinary Child Protection Team which provides opportunities for case-specific discussion. The self assessment also indicates that the agency director meets routinely with directors from other local service agencies to identify and discuss needs for system improvement. Many stakeholders expressed a desire for increased communication and collaboration on an individual case level to help ensure that families' needs are being met to prevent duplication of services.

**Supervisor and Social Worker Resources.** The Band's self assessment indicates that the ICW agency employs 36 staff members. Until recently, the agency director was responsible for day-to-day supervision of all staff, as well as ensuring that all managerial tasks were completed. While the director remains very involved in day-to-day casework activities, the agency currently employs two supervisors, two coordinators and a senior social worker. The self assessment indicates that agency social workers have high caseloads, but current financial constraints prohibit hiring additional staff. While this review examined only casework practice on AICWI cases, caseworkers also continue to work with Minnesota counties and agencies in other states to provide services to Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) eligible children. Agency caseworkers are dedicated to achieving positive outcomes for the children and families they serve.

**Quality Assurance System.** The agency has a number of quality assurance practices in place, including team decision-making processes and supervisory review of casework practices. The agency is encouraged to develop a qualitative case review process that yields findings on achievement of outcomes, includes procedures for analyzing findings, and results in effective implementation of practice and systemic changes.

## 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).

Review and revise agency screening criteria to ensure that educational neglect reports are assigned for a maltreatment investigation or assessment (MnCF SR Items 1 and 4).

Access training and technical assistance to review agency screening practices and procedural requirements in conducting child protection assessments and investigations.

### Permanency

Ensure efforts to facilitate frequent, quality visitation between children and their fathers and siblings placed in separate foster homes (MnCF SR Item 13).

### Well-being

Identify and address barriers to engaging fathers in child welfare cases (MnCF SR Items 13, 16, 17, 18 and 20).

Ensure comprehensive assessment of needs and provision of appropriate services for children and fathers (MnCF SR Item 17).

Ensure placement of children in a licensed foster home or facility when the agency has placement authority (MnCF SR Item 17).

Ensure children's physical and dental health needs are assessed and that needed treatment is provided (MnCF SR Item 22).

### Systemic Factors

Review opportunities for increased case-level coordination and collaboration with service providers.

Enhance quality assurance system to measure achievement of outcomes and 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 White Earth 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 documentation and data 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	White Earth Band Performance 2008
Safety Indicator 1: Absence of Maltreatment Recurrence.	94.6%	↑	94.86%	100% * (3 / 3)

Safety Indicator 2: Absence of CA/N in Foster Care	99.68%	↑	99.69%	100% * (100 / 100)
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% * (9 / 9)
C1.2 Median length of stay in foster care to reunification (months)	5.4	↓	3.98	4.7 *
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 / 2)
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%	NA
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%	66.7% * (4 / 6)
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	3 *
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 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?	22.7%	↑	21%	66.7% * (2 / 3)
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 6 months of the year shown?	10.9%	↑	2.1%	0% (0 / 3)
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%	50% (1 / 2)
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%	NA
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 was 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%	0% * (0 / 1)
Permanency Composite 4: Placement Stability (no components)				
C4.1 Of all children served in foster care during the year shown who were	86.0%	↑	86.1%	90.2% *

in foster care for at least eight days but less than 12 months, what percent had two or fewer placement settings?				(74 / 82)
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%	88.9% * (8 / 9)
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% * (2 / 2)

\*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	79	49.4%	21.5%	69.5%
Investigations – Alleged Substantial Child Endangerment	Jan-June 2009	3	100%	0%	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%	12.5% (3 / 24)
8 – 30 days	10.6%	29.2% (7 / 24)
31 – 90 days	13.4%	8.3% (2 / 24)
91 – 180 days	11.2%	16.7% (4 / 24)
181 – 365 days	15.9%	20.8% (5 / 24)
366+ days	24.7%	12.5% (3 / 24)

DHS Children's Research and Evaluation

Children in Out-of-home Care by Placement Setting

Table 4

(Children may be counted in more than one placement setting)

Placement Setting	2008	
	State %	Band %
Foster Family Non-relative	38.7%	66.7%
Foster Family Relative	12.7%	22.7%
Foster Home – Corporate/Shift Staff	1.3%	0%
Group Home	11.6%	0.7%
Juvenile Correctional Facility (locked)	3.5%	0%
Juvenile Correctional Facility (non-secure)	6.7%	1.3%
Pre-adoptive Non-relative	4.2%	4%

Pre-adoptive Relative	2.0%	4%
Residential Treatment Center	19.1%	0.7%
Other*	0.2%	0%
Total Placement Settings	22,947	150

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

Minnesota's Child Welfare Report 2008

MnCFSR Outcomes and Items Performance Ratings

The following table summarizes the review findings for the White Earth Band of Ojibwe outcomes and performance items.

<b>OUTCOME AND PERFORMANCE ITEMS</b>		% Substantially Achieved	% Strength
<b>SAFETY OUTCOME 1</b>	Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect	50% (2 / 4)	
ITEM 1	Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment		50% (2 / 4)
ITEM 2	Repeat maltreatment		100% (3 / 3)
<b>SAFETY OUTCOME 2</b>	Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate	83.3% (5 / 6)	
ITEM 3	Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal or re-entry into foster care		100% (5 / 5)
ITEM 4	Risk assessment and safety management		83.3% (5 / 6)
<b>PERMANENCY OUTCOME 1</b>	Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	100% (4 / 4)	
ITEM 5	Foster care re-entries		100% (3 / 3)
ITEM 6	Stability of foster care placement		100% (4 / 4)
ITEM 7	Permanency goal for child		100% (4 / 4)
ITEM 8	Reunification or transfer of permanent legal and physical custody to a relative		100% (4 / 4)
ITEM 9	Adoption		100% (1 / 1)
ITEM 10	Permanency goal of long-term foster care		NA
<b>PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2</b>	The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children	25% (1 / 4)	
ITEM 11	Proximity of foster care placement		100% (4 / 4)
ITEM 12	Placement with siblings		0% (0 / 1)
ITEM 13	Visits with parents and siblings in foster care		50% (2 / 4)
ITEM 14	Preservation of connections		75% (3 / 4)
ITEM 15	Relative placement		75% (3 / 4)
ITEM 16	Relationship of child in care with parents		50% (2 / 4)
<b>WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1</b>	Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs	33.3% (2 / 6)	
ITEM 17	Needs and services of child, parents and foster parents		33.3% (2 / 6)
ITEM 18	Child and family involvement in case planning		66.7% (4 / 6)

ITEM 19	Worker visits with child		100% (6 / 6)
ITEM 20	Worker visits with parent(s)		83.3% (5 / 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	40% (2 / 5)	
ITEM 22	Physical health of the child		25% (1 / 4)
ITEM 23	Mental/behavioral health of the child		66.7% (2 / 3)