

TALKING POINTS ON SOUTH CAROLINA'S IMPROVED CHILD SAFETY

Since I became the DSS State Director in 2011, we have done much, very quickly, to measurably improve child safety as well as permanency and well-being for children who have been abused or neglected. While preventing all preventable harm to children may seem unattainable, we have been aggressively implementing systemic reforms in DSS practices to tackle the complacency of the past. We are demanding that child safety is always paramount and requiring that our staff embrace and implement best practices to achieve the outcomes of enduring child safety, well-being and permanency for the children who enter or otherwise touch our Child Protective Services (CPS) at DSS.

With our extensive new accountability and performance management measures, including new staff training and performance coaching, comprehensive data-driven management, greatly enhanced performance monitoring, increased supervision and follow-up, increased frequency and scope of Quality Assurance Reviews for every DSS County CPS office, new "Huddles" with DSS State and County staff along with stakeholders including Foster Care Review Board members, Citizen Review Panel members, Foster Parent Association members and others, new "push alerts" to boost compliance to best practices, and many more strategies, DSS has rapidly improved measures of child safety over the past two years.

For example:

- During the most recent 12 months reported to the Federal government (October 1, 2011 - September 30, 2012), DSS performance has greatly exceeded the Federal child safety standard that 94.6% of children who have been maltreated will not experience a recurrence of maltreatment within 6 months. This means that DSS performed at 97.2% which is 2.8% better than this Federal child safety standard requires.
- Another child safety improvement is the improvement in monthly face-to-face contacts between CPS workers and their assigned foster children in Active Foster Care Cases. Specifically, DSS increased from 85% in FFY 2008 to 91% in FFY 2012 (October 1, 2011 – September 30, 2012).
- Also, the number of children in In-Home/Family Preservation Cases (formerly called Treatment Cases) with no face-to-face contact was 1,327 in January of 2012 and DSS reduced that number to 457 in June 2013.
- Yet another improvement in child safety is the increase in the rate at which child abuse and neglect investigations are substantiated (also called "indicated" or "founded"); as of 07/15/13 the substantiated rate is at 53% as compared to 40% in December 2011.
- In the last year, DSS has "screened out" at intake 5,600 fewer reports of child abuse and neglect and, instead, they were referred for further action to be taken.

- Also, since DSS started implementing new community-based prevention services to strengthen families statewide in 2012 to date, families served in South Carolina has increased by 148%, instead of providing no services to families and waiting for their risk to get “bad enough” for their children to enter DSS foster or get DSS supervision.

Additionally, we have rapidly advanced toward our goal of safe and thriving children with life-long families sooner. For example:

- As of June 30, 2013, as many as 1,749 long-term foster children got life-long families, mostly through adoptions (1,040 adoptions and 709 reunifications with birth families). Also, 158 adoptions were achieved for children in foster care for less than 17 months.
- For the first time, DSS hired a Medical Director in April 2013 who is a board certified child and adolescent psychiatrist. This Doctor has begun implementing an oversight structure to monitor psychotropic medications statewide, educating DSS staff on medication and mental health issues with the goal of improving mental health outcomes for children served by DSS.

We are continuing to push ahead with improvements to child safety, well-being and permanency because there is a lot more work to do. Other initiatives and innovations to increase safety for South Carolina’s children are in the process of implementation and refinement.