

## **Richland County Department of Social Services Corrective Action Plan**

**May 13, 2014**

Front-line caseworkers at the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) are responsible for investigating and managing complex situations that involve children and families going through very difficult and even tragic times. As a result, every county and every worker face unique challenges.

While each office has unique needs for resources and improvements, it has become clear that Richland County stands out as needing additional assistance. Accordingly, DSS has initiated an intensive corrective action plan to immediately and sustainably improve child welfare services in Richland County.

### **Staffing**

- A 20-person intensive casework team has been dispatched to immediately relieve Richland County caseloads. This will be a combination of caseworkers coming into the Richland County office and caseworkers in surrounding counties taking on Richland County's cases.
- Additional caseworkers will be hired and fully trained over the next five months for staffing investigations, foster care, family preservation, and in supervisory capacities. Although additional resources are not the only answer to Richland County's problems, caseload and performance data has clearly shown that quality cannot be improved until local staff has more manageable caseloads.
- In addition to being relieved of individual cases, additional supervisors will be hired to improve oversight of caseload ratios, and allowed to refocus their work on evaluation, continuous improvement of staff performance, and seamless transition of cases between caseworkers.
- Creating a second shift in Richland County. The needs of children and families are not limited to a 9-5 schedule, and neither are DSS caseworkers. Establishing a second shift will make the agency more flexible and responsive to the needs of the individuals they serve, and the community as a whole.
- Providing regional supports for the intake process. In order to standardize the process for initial receipt of reports of abuse, bring consistency to the evaluation of those reports, and better manage caseloads through improved assignment and distribution of investigations, DSS will specialize intake caseworkers and provide regional intake supports to county offices.

### **Multiagency Coordination**

A number of the families served by DSS often interact with local law enforcement and the courts, cooperating social service agencies, and are sometimes in need of additional social services such as substance abuse or mental health counseling. To improve continuity of services and improve family outcomes, Richland County DSS will:

- Employ a full-time liaison to coordinate with Richland County Sheriff's Office, Richland County Coroner, and Richland County CASA.
- Partner with the Department of Alcohol and other Drug Abuse Services to provide better access to care for DSS families. This will include a dedicated case manager to work in the DSS office, integrated residential treatment for entire families, substance abuse cross-training for SC DSS staff, and enhanced drug screening for DSS families.
- Establish a single point-of-contact for local service coordination with the South Carolina Department of Mental Health (SCDMH). Although DSS and SCDMH collaborate on a variety of initiatives to improve mental health services for DSS children and families, SCDMH has agreed to appoint a single liaison for the Richland County DSS office that is responsible for coordinating interagency activities at the local level.
- Incorporating DSS into the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) Fusion Center. DSS has identified two employees that will be stationed in the Fusion Center that will perform two basic functions:
  1. Activate law enforcement intervention when required by law or policy to improve responses to critical life, health, or safety needs.

## **Richland County Department of Social Services Corrective Action Plan**

**May 13, 2014**

2. Relay information to caseworkers in the field regarding a child's status, developing law enforcement information about DSS families, and to aid in visual identification of DSS children or supervised families.

### **Previous County Interventions**

The proposed initiative to turn-round Richland County's DSS office, while more aggressive than past interventions, is not without precedent when counties with significant challenges are identified. Recently, an intervention in Greenville County improved outcomes, as measured across numerous indicators, detailed below.

### **Greenville**

Percentage of Strengths, Greenville County

Item	November 2011	June 2013
Timeliness of initiating investigations	83%	95%
Reoccurrence of maltreatment	89%	95%
Foster care re-entries	75%	88%
Stability of foster care placement	60%	65%
Permanency goal for child	65%	65%
Reunification, guardianship, or perm placement with relatives	67%	78%
Placement with siblings	42%	57%
Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care	39%	50%
Relative placement	28%	63%
Needs & services for child, parents, caregivers	35%	58%
Child & family involvement in case planning	40%	65%
Worker visits with child	68%	80%

Source: DSS Greenville County Quality Assurance Review, November 2011 and June 2013

DSS Child Welfare Quality Assurance Reviews are conducted using the *Onsite Review Instrument* (OSRI) finalized by the federal Administration for Children & Families (ACF) in July 2008. This instrument is used to review foster care and family preservation services cases.