



Evaluating Minnesota's Child Welfare System: A Review of Safety, Permanency and Well-Being Outcomes for Children and Families in Beltrami County



Minnesota Department of **Human Services**
Child Safety and Permanency Division
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Executive Summary

In April 2006, the Minnesota Department of Human Services reviewed the child welfare system in Beltrami County. The purpose of the Minnesota Child and Family Service Review is to identify strengths and areas needing improvement in child welfare practice and systems, with an emphasis on partnering with counties to use the results to plan for program improvements.

Findings for the Beltrami County review were derived from an assessment prepared by the county agency, their performance on national standard indicators, the ratings on outcomes and performance items from the on-site case review and input from community stakeholders. Self assessment findings were based on the county agency's evaluation of eight systemic factors and review of safety and permanency data. Beltrami County identified the effectiveness of their Child Protection Team, consistent review of foster care placements and training for foster parents among their strengths. Areas needing improvement included a need to develop policies and protocols regarding the use of the Social Service Information System (SSIS) and staff training. Beltrami County met four of six national standard indicators in 2004, including incidence of child abuse/neglect in foster care, foster care re-entries, stability of foster care placements and length of time to achieve reunification. The national standard indicators were not met for recurrence of maltreatment and length of time to achieve adoption.

The on-site case review consisted of an intensive examination of 12 cases, selected at random, of children in the child welfare system from February 1, 2005, through January 31, 2006. It is significant to note that the Beltrami County review was unique in that 11 of the 12 cases reviewed involved American Indian children who were members of the Red Lake and Leech Lake tribes. This provided an opportunity for the county to evaluate and receive feedback on multiple aspects of their work with tribes, including overall working relationships and delivery of culturally appropriate services.

Beltrami County met substantial conformity on Well-being Outcome 2 (meeting the educational needs of children) and had ratings of Strength in nine of 24 performance items. The county had the strongest findings in the areas of Safety Outcome 2 (maintaining children in their homes whenever possible and appropriate) and Well-being Outcome 2. Performance items related to Safety Outcome 1 (protecting children from abuse and neglect) and Well-being Outcome 1 (enhancing families' capacity to provide for their children's needs) were the most often rated as Areas Needing Improvement. It is important to recognize that ratings were based on a relatively small sample of cases measured against high performance standards.

Information received from community stakeholder interviews was largely consistent with the county self assessment and findings from case reviews. In addition to systemic strengths described by the agency, stakeholders reported that the county makes considerable efforts to place children with relatives. More frequent and flexible visitation between children in out-of-home care and their parents was identified as a need.

Beltrami County will prepare a Program Improvement Plan within 90 days of receiving this report to address those outcome and performance items that were not rated in substantial conformity or as strengths. The Quality Assurance staff of the Minnesota Department of Human Services is

available to assist with identifying appropriate strategies and interventions for the Program Improvement Plan. Beltrami County 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.

Introduction

The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) conducted a Minnesota Child and Family Service Review of the child welfare system in Beltrami County in April 2006. Findings for the Beltrami County review were derived from the self assessment prepared by the county agency, performance on national standard indicators, the ratings on outcomes and performance items from the on-site case review, and input from community stakeholders.

The review team consisted of a Beltrami County caseworker, two child welfare supervisors from nearby counties, the Beltrami County children's mental health coordinator, a guardian ad litem, the district guardian ad litem program manager, and the DHS American Indian disparities coordinator. Additional DHS staff provided on-site coordination and assistance, reviewed the county's self assessment document, appraised case record reviews, facilitated community stakeholder interviews, and presented preliminary findings to agency administration and staff at an exit conference.

The Beltrami County self assessment provided an overall assessment of strengths and areas needing improvement focusing on those areas that warranted further examination in the on-site review. Systemic factors identified as strengths included the case review system, provider training and agency responsiveness to the community. Systemic factors identified as areas needing improvement included use of the Social Service Information System (SSIS) and staff training.

Twelve cases of children in the child welfare system from February 1, 2005 through January 31, 2006, were reviewed, including four in-home and eight placement cases. Eleven of the 12 cases involved American Indian children. The most frequently-cited primary reasons for agency involvement with the children and their families included neglect and use of chemicals (including alcohol, cocaine and methamphetamines) by a parent. If not cited as the primary reason for involvement, substance use by a parent and the children's behavior, were identified as secondary problems in a number of the cases.

The on-site case reviews included interviews with key participants in the case. Thirty-four case-related interviews were conducted, which consisted of 14 caseworkers, nine guardians ad litem, three mothers, two probation officers, two providers, one child, one foster mother, one foster father and one relative. Thirty of the interviews were conducted in person and four by phone.

Nine community stakeholder interviews were completed. All of the interviews included multiple participants. Community stakeholders included foster parents, agency caseworkers, agency administration, the county attorney's office, public defenders, guardians ad litem, a district court judge, court administration staff, Leech Lake Tribal Social Services representatives, Red Lake Family and Children's Services representatives, law enforcement, corrections agency staff and public health.

The following tables summarize Beltrami County's performance on national standard indicators; safety, permanency and well-being outcomes; and related performance items. It is important to remember that outcome and performance item ratings were based on a relatively small sample of case records and were measured against a high level of performance expectation. Records

selected for the review were presumed to be representative of agency practice and their compliance with statutes, policies and standards. Case-related interviews were used to augment information found in the case record and contributed significantly to the overall findings.

The following table summarizes the national standard indicator definitions and measurements, and provides a comparison to the most current state and Beltrami County performance rates.

Data Indicator	National Standard	County 2004 / 2005	Minnesota 2004 / 2005
The national standard for recurrence of maltreatment is met if, of all children who were victims of determined maltreatment during the first six months of the period under review, 6.1 percent or fewer children have another determined report within six months.	6.1%	9.1%	5.1%
		0% **	5.3%
The national standard for incidence of child abuse/neglect in foster care is met if, of all children in foster care, the percentage of children who were the subject of determined maltreatment by a foster parent is 0.57 percent or less.	0.57%	0% *	0.2%
		0% **	0.52%
The national standard for foster care re-entries is met if, of all children who entered foster care, 8.6 percent or fewer of those children re-entered foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care placement.	8.6%	6.7% *	22.7%
		13.8%	19.3%
The national standard for stability of foster care placements is met if, of all children who have been in foster care less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal, 86.7 percent or more had no more than two placement settings.	86.7%	89.3% *	91.6%
		88.3% **	89.8%
The national standard for length of time to achieve reunification is met if, of all children who were reunified with their parents or caretakers at the time of discharge from foster care, 76.2 percent or more were reunified in less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal from home.	76.2%	78.1% *	91.9%
		94.9% **	91.4%
The national standard for length of time to achieve adoption is met if, of all children who exited care to a finalized adoption, 32 percent or more exited care in less than 24 months.	32.0%	12.5%	40.4%
		0%	47%

*The county met the national standard in 2004.

**The county met the national standard in 2005.

A Program Improvement Plan will be developed by the county in response to each data indicator that did not meet the national standard in both 2004 and 2005; and for each performance item that was not rated as a Strength in at least 85 percent of the cases reviewed. The Program

Improvement Plan is due 90 days after the receipt of this final report. Planning for program improvement is the most important part of the review process. The strategies for change and improvement of practice outlined in the county's plan will focus the agency's efforts on improving outcomes for the children and families they serve. The ratings on the Safety, Permanency and Well-being Outcomes from the Minnesota Child and Family Service Review will provide a baseline for measuring ongoing quality improvements.

This report provides a detailed examination of each outcome and performance item assessed in the Minnesota Child and Family Service Review. The status of each outcome is described in terms of cases substantially achieved and conformity with national standards. Findings of Strength or Area Needing Improvement, determined by the case reviews, were made for each of the 24 performance items. Each item was analyzed regarding specific measures of the case review instrument and reviewer observations. In addition, there are summaries of stakeholder input and self assessment information specific to each performance item.

Rating performance on systemic factors was not the goal of this review process. Rather, the aim was to assist the county in exploring each of the systemic factors and identifying areas of strength and areas needing improvement that will support their future policy and program development. Observations regarding systemic factors are included throughout the report as they apply to the outcomes and performance items. Key findings related to systemic factors are summarized at the conclusion of the report and will be addressed in the county's Program Improvement Plan.

The following table summarizes the review findings for Beltrami County outcomes and performance items.

OUTCOME AND PERFORMANCE ITEMS		% Substantially Achieved	% Strength	Requires Program Improvement Plan
SAFETY OUTCOME 1	Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect	72.7%		
ITEM 1	Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment		75%	Yes
SUPPLEMENT ITEM	Screening decisions and thoroughness of assessments		75%	Yes
ITEM 2	Repeat maltreatment		90%	No
SAFETY OUTCOME 2	Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate	91.7%		
ITEM 3	Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal		100%	No
ITEM 4	Risk of harm to child(ren)		91.7%	No

PERMANENCY OUTCOME 1	Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	62.5%		
ITEM 5	Foster care re-entries		100%	No
ITEM 6	Stability of foster care placement		50%	Yes
ITEM 7	Permanency goal for child		87.5%	No
ITEM 8	Reunification or transfer of permanent legal and physical custody to a relative		42.9%	Yes
ITEM 9	Adoption		100% *	Yes
ITEM 10	Permanency goal of long term foster care		NA	No
PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2	The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children	75%		
ITEM 11	Proximity of foster care placement		100%	No
ITEM 12	Placement with siblings		50%	Yes
ITEM 13	Visits with parents and siblings in foster care		71.4%	Yes
ITEM 14	Preservation of connections		100%	No
ITEM 15	Relative placement		85.7%	No
ITEM 16	Relationship of child in care with parents		85.7%	No
WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1	Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs	50%		
ITEM 17	Needs and services of child, parents and foster parents		58.3%	Yes
ITEM 18	Child and family involvement in case planning		58.3%	Yes
ITEM 19	Worker visits with child		75%	Yes
ITEM 20	Worker visits with parent(s)		63.6%	Yes
WELL-BEING OUTCOME 2	Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs	85.7%		
ITEM 21	Educational needs of the child		85.7%	No
WELL-BEING OUTCOME 3	Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs	41.7%		
ITEM 22	Physical health of the child		62.5%	Yes
ITEM 23	Mental health of the child		50%	Yes

*A Program Improvement Plan is required due to the county's performance on a national standard indicator related to the outcome.

EVALUATING THE FINDINGS: SAFETY

When evaluating Safety, all children in the family were considered and ratings were made in both placement and in-home cases.

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 1

Safety Outcome 1 evaluated the following performance items:

- Timeliness of initiation and thoroughness of investigations or assessments
- Frequency of repeat determinations of abuse and neglect, and whether the same perpetrator and general allegations were involved.

In order to determine substantial conformity on Safety Outcome 1, the outcome must have been rated as substantially achieved in 90 percent of the cases reviewed, plus the county data indicators must have met the national standards.

With 72.7 percent of cases being rated as substantially achieved, Beltrami County did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. In addition, Beltrami County met both national standards in 2005.

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.				
Number of cases reviewed according to degree of outcome achievement:				
	Total Number	Total Percentage		
Substantially achieved:	8	72.7%		
Partially achieved:	3	27.3%		
Not achieved or addressed:	0	0%		
Not applicable:	1	--		
Conformity of county data indicators with national standards:				
	National Standard	County Percentage	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard
Recurrence of maltreatment	6.1%	9.1%	X (2005)	X (2004)
Incidence of child abuse/neglect in foster care	0.57%	0%	X	

Item 1. Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement _____ Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 1 was applicable in eight of 12 cases reviewed. Timeliness of initiating investigations focused on the agency's response to reports of maltreatment based on the nature of the report and priority level. In assessing Item 1, reviewers determined whether the response to maltreatment reports occurring during the period under review had been initiated in accordance with state policy. For reports received prior to August 1, 2005, state policy required an immediate response to reports of maltreatment that indicated a child was in imminent danger. When a report of maltreatment did not indicate a child was in imminent danger, the agency could delay initiating the assessment up to 72 hours. State policy

regarding the timeliness for initiating a Family Assessment (formerly known as Alternative Response) required person-to-person contact with the family within five working days from the date the report was accepted for an assessment. For reports received on or after August 1, 2005, state policy requires an immediate response to reports of maltreatment that allege substantial child endangerment. When a report of maltreatment does not allege substantial child endangerment, state policy requires initiation of the investigation or assessment and face-to-face contact with the family within five calendar days of the date the report is accepted for assessment. The results of the assessment were as follows:

- Item 1 was rated a Strength in three of four in-home cases and three of four placement cases, or 75 percent of applicable cases.
- Item 1 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in two applicable cases (25 percent).
- Item 1 was Not Applicable in four cases.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength when reviewers determined that workers initiated an investigation of a child maltreatment report in accordance with state policy, including the requirement to conduct a face-to-face observation of a child in the initial stages of an assessment. Cases were rated as Area Needing Improvement when the response to a report was not initiated within the required timelines or the child was not observed. Cases were Not Applicable when they did not involve reports of maltreatment during the period under review.

The assessment of Item 1 also identified the following:

Case	Number of reports received on children in the family		Number of reports screened in and assigned for investigation/assessment	Number of investigations/assessments initiated within required timeframes	Number of assessments in which face-to-face contact with child was made within state guidelines
	Over the life of the case	During the period under review			
1	1	1	1	1	1
2	10	5	3	3	1
3	4	1	1	1	1
4	2	2	1	1	1
5	1	1	1	1	1
6	2	0	NA	NA	NA
7	6	1	1	1	0
8	6	3	3	3	3
9	0	0	NA	NA	NA
10	9	0	NA	NA	NA
11	0	0	NA	NA	NA
12	1	1	1	1	1

Summary of Case Review Findings: There was one Family Assessment and 11 investigations completed in the eight applicable cases reviewed. In all of the cases, the assessments and investigations were initiated within required timeframes, frequently on the same day or within 24 hours of the report being screened in. In six cases, face-to-face contact with children occurred within required timelines. In addition, reviewers noted two examples of investigators and caseworkers in already open cases working together to complete assessments and investigations.

In both cases rated as Area Needing Improvement, the issue identified was face-to-face contact with alleged child victims. In one case, one investigation was completed during the period under review. During that investigation, three of four alleged victims were seen by the caseworker. There was no indication that contact had been made with the fourth child during the investigation. In the other case noted as needing improvement, three investigations were completed during the period under review. In one of the investigations, two of three alleged victims were seen; in another investigation, there was no indication that the caseworker had face-to-face contact with any of the alleged victims.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders who have made child protection reports observed that agency intake staff was readily available and responsive to their calls. Follow-up calls were made by agency intake staff if additional information was needed to finalize a screening decision. Stakeholders also observed that the agency was timely in responding to reports of child maltreatment. Law enforcement and Beltrami County Human Services conducted joint investigations and, overall, there was a very positive working relationship between law enforcement and child protection staff. Stakeholders also indicated that the current system for responding to reports outside of normal working hours was effective, and child protection staff were available when needed.

County Self Assessment: The number of assessments completed ranges between eight to 12 assessments per worker per month, which is within best practices guidelines. Caseloads are increasing in complexity due to increased methamphetamine utilization within Beltrami County, increased sexual abuse cases, and the number of cases involving fetal alcohol syndrome/effect.

Eighty-six percent of cases accepted for assessment or investigation were seen within 24 hours. Those that were not were considered low risk cases or were visited but reporting was not completed in a timely fashion. Intake screenings are conducted twice per week. Cases are also assigned for investigation if circumstances demand immediate reaction.

Summary: Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Information across data sources – case reviews, stakeholder comments and county self assessment data – was fairly consistent. The agency provided timely response to reports of child maltreatment. Case review findings indicated some inconsistency in the timeliness of face-to-face contact with alleged victims.

Supplemental Item. Screening and Assessment

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement _____ Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of this Supplemental Item was applicable in eight of 12 cases. This item is not included in the federal list of performance items and is not an indicator used in determining substantial conformity on any of the seven federal Child and Family Service Review Outcomes. The Screening and Assessment Supplemental Item was added to evaluate the appropriateness of child protection screening decisions and the thoroughness of child protection assessments. The amount and quality of contact by the agency with alleged victims and offenders were evaluated along with the rationale for the assessment decisions. These areas of child

protection practice are not adequately addressed in any of the 23 Child and Family Service Review performance items. The results of the assessments were as follows:

- This Supplemental Item was rated a Strength in three of four in-home cases and three of four placement cases, or 75 percent of applicable cases.
- The Supplemental Item was rated an Area Needing Improvement in two applicable cases (25 percent).
- The Supplemental Item was not applicable in four cases.

A rating of Strength was made when child protection screening decisions were consistent with the criteria outlined in Minnesota Rules and Statutes, and the agency made sufficient contact with the alleged victims, offenders, and collateral contacts to support assessment determinations. A rating of Area Needing Improvement was made when screening decisions were not consistent with screening criteria or contact was not adequate to make the required assessment decisions. Cases were Not Applicable when there were no child maltreatment reports received during the period under review.

The assessment of the Supplemental Item also identified the following:

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
Appropriate screening decisions were made based on criteria and legal definitions of abuse and/or neglect:	8	0	4
The agency conducted thorough assessments that addressed all allegations and maintained sufficient contact to assess risk and ensure safety of the children:	6	2	4
Determinations of whether maltreatment occurred were based on a preponderance of evidence:	7	0	5
Determinations of whether child protection services were needed were based on an assessment of risk:	8	0	4

Summary of Case Review Findings: In all applicable cases, appropriate decisions to screen reports in and conduct an assessment were made and based on statutory criteria. In addition, determinations of maltreatment were based on a preponderance of evidence in all investigation cases, and determinations/decisions to provide child protection services were based on a risk assessment. Reviewers noted consistent use of Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools, e.g. Safety Assessments, Risk Assessments and Strengths and Needs Assessments. Reviewers also cited appropriate identification of collateral sources in one case.

In both cases rated as Area Needing Improvement, thorough investigations were not completed. This determination was made due to lack of face-to-face contact with alleged victims during investigations in both cases. Details of the contacts are laid out within Item 1.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders who were also members of the county’s Child Protection Team indicated that they were familiar with the agency’s screening criteria. Stakeholders observed that agency child protection workers were skillful interviewers and sensitive to the needs of children and families. Some stakeholders suggested that it would be helpful if the agency could clarify its criteria for assigning cases for a Family Assessment versus investigative response.

Leech Lake tribal representatives observed that they were notified by Beltrami County after a child protection investigation had been initiated, including the names of the children involved. However, tribal social service staff was not routinely invited to participate in investigations/assessments. Recognizing that staff may not always be available to participate, they expressed a desire to be notified before an assessment/investigation was initiated, and to have the option of participating. In addition, tribal representatives noted that they have not consistently received notifications regarding the results of investigations and assessments. Tribal representatives indicated that they recently had seen some increase in communication during the assessment/investigation phase.

County Self Assessment: The Intake Screening Team meets twice per week. This team includes two intake workers, two assessment workers, a foster care worker, an in-home worker, and case managers, as needed. The screening team is also used to review existing cases and to track existing cases through dispositional phases. Cases are opened based on risk determination, previous reports, either opened or not opened, and other factors.

Family Assessment rates in Beltrami County have been low overall. Procedures have been changed during the past year which will increase the numbers of cases assigned as Family Assessments.

Summary: The Supplemental Item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Overall, the agency conducts thorough assessments, and assessment and investigation decisions/determinations are based on an assessment of risk. Case review findings in this area were consistent with findings in Item 1.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 2 was applicable in 10 of 12 cases reviewed. It referred to the incidence of multiple determined reports of maltreatment arising from the same general conditions or by the same perpetrator. In assessing Item 2, reviewers determined whether there had been at least one substantiated maltreatment report during the period under review, and if so, whether another substantiated report occurred within six months of that report. This item applied to Family Assessment cases in the following way: reviewers determined whether a Family Assessment was conducted during the period under review that resulted in the provision of post-assessment services based on a formal risk assessment with a moderate or higher level of risk; and, if so, whether another Family Assessment occurred within six months of that report that also resulted in the provision of post-assessment services based on a formal risk assessment with a moderate or higher level of risk. The results of the assessment were as follows:

- Item 2 was rated a Strength in all three applicable in-home cases and six of seven placement cases, or 90 percent of applicable cases.
- Item 2 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in one applicable case (10 percent).
- Item 2 was Not Applicable in two cases.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength when there were no substantiated maltreatment reports during the period under review, or there was one substantiated report but there was not another one within a six-month period. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement

when there was a determined report of maltreatment within six months of a previously determined maltreatment report involving the same general conditions or same perpetrator. Cases were Not Applicable when the case was not open due to a report of abuse or neglect.

The assessment of Item 2 also identified the following:

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
Over the life of the case, there was at least one determined report of maltreatment on any child in the family, or at least one Family Assessment that resulted in post-assessment services based on a formal risk assessment with a moderate or higher level of risk:	10	2	
During the period under review, there was at least one determined report of maltreatment on any child in the family, or at least one Family Assessment that resulted in post-assessment services based on a formal risk assessment with a moderate or higher level of risk:	7	5	
When there were determined reports of maltreatment during the period under review, there was another determined report within six months:	1	6	5
When there were multiple determined reports of maltreatment, the reports involved the same perpetrator or the same general circumstances:	1	0	11

Summary of Case Review Findings: Overall, positive results were noted in the cases reviewed. In three cases, there had been at least one determination of maltreatment over the life of the case, but none during the period under review. In six cases, there was one determination during the period under review, but not within six months of a previous determination, nor were there subsequent determinations. Reviewers noted that appropriate services were provided in response to reports which aided in preventing subsequent maltreatment to children.

In the one case rated as Area Needing Improvement, there were three maltreatment reports in four months, and two maltreatment determinations within three months of each other. The reports were of the same general conditions and the same alleged offender. Reviewers noted that a Child in Need of Protection or Services (CHIPS) petition was initiated following the first maltreatment determination, and that the children were removed from the home some time after the second maltreatment determination.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders who were involved in screening reports of child maltreatment indicated that it was not uncommon to receive reports on families that have had previous involvement with the child protection system. They also observed, however, that agency investigators and assessors approached new reports with a fresh outlook and considered any new or additional information received.

County Self Assessment: Beltrami County’s rate of recurrence of maltreatment is slightly higher than the state average and the national standard. This assumption, based on the rate of recurrence, reflects the continuing problems seen with drug and alcohol use in the county. In addition, reunification efforts are very active. It may be that there are cases where reunification occurred before the family was able to gain the level of stability needed to prevent recurrence of maltreatment.

Summary: Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. There was some inconsistency across sources of information. Overall, case review findings and stakeholder comments were positive in this area, but the county did not meet the national standard for recurrence of maltreatment. The county did not meet the related national standard in 2004, which was the most recent data available at the time of the review. However, 2005 data has since been released and, because the county met the national standard in 2005, this is not an area that will need to be addressed in the county’s Program Improvement Plan.

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 2

Safety Outcome 2 evaluated the services to families that protect children in the home and prevent removal, and specific intervention efforts made by the agency to reduce or remove the risk of harm. Outcome 2 must have been rated as substantially achieved in 90 percent of the cases reviewed to be in substantial conformity. With 91.7 percent of the cases reviewed rated as substantially achieved, Beltrami County achieved substantial conformity.

Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.		
Number of cases reviewed according to degree of outcome achievement:		
	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially achieved:	11	91.7%
Partially achieved:	1	8.3%
Not achieved or addressed:	0	0%
Not applicable:	0	--

Item 3. Services to families to protect child(ren) in the home and prevent removal

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 3 was applicable in 10 of 12 cases reviewed. Services to families to protect children in the home and prevent removal focused on whether reasonable efforts were made to prevent removal of children from their homes. In assessing Item 3, reviewers determined whether, in responding to substantiated maltreatment reports or risk of harm, the agency made diligent efforts to provide services to families to prevent removal of children from their homes while at the same time ensuring their safety. The results of this assessment were as follows:

- Item 3 was rated a Strength in all four in-home cases and all six placement cases, or 100 percent of applicable cases.
- Item 3 was Not Applicable in two cases.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength when the agency provided or arranged for services to the family to protect children in the home before removal, when appropriate, or children were removed from the home and placed in foster care because the risk of harm was too high to warrant preventive services. Cases were Not Applicable when there were no substantiated maltreatment reports or identified risks of harm to children in the home during the period under review; or the children were in foster care during the entire period under review, and there were no children in the family home.

The assessment of Item 3 also identified the following:

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
For the period under review, there were determined reports of abuse or neglect, or risk of harm to the children:	12	0	
When there were determined reports or risk of harm to the children, the agency provided or arranged for services to the family to protect the children in the home before removal:	6	4	2
The agency completed a Structured Decision Making Safety Assessment:	9	0	3

Summary of Case Review Findings: In a number of cases, the agency provided an array of appropriate and timely services to prevent children’s removal from their homes. In addition, reviewers noted examples of either multiple attempts to provide services, or multiple services being provided for extended periods of time.

In six of the cases reviewed, children were removed from their homes and placed on a 72-hour hold due to immediate safety needs. In two of those cases, children were returned home within a short timeframe and appropriate services were provided to prevent another entry into care. In two in-home cases, services were provided and placement did not occur. In the remaining cases, reviewers noted that the agency had provided services in an attempt to prevent placement of children. In two cases no entry into care occurred, and in two cases children did eventually enter placement when the risk was too great to be managed in the home.

Stakeholder Interviews: Overall, stakeholders observed that the agency made reasonable and/or active efforts to prevent unnecessary out-of-home placement of children and, in general, multiple services were provided to families, sometimes over extended periods of time. Some stakeholders commented that efforts could have been documented more clearly so that the court was fully informed of all efforts that had taken place. The court report format had recently been modified to more effectively communicate all of the agency’s efforts to the court. Stakeholders also observed that, overall there was appropriate use of 72-hour holds. Some stakeholders noted that decisions to place children on emergency holds, particularly in situations that occur outside of normal working hours, had been made without the benefit of consultation with social services staff. They encouraged more consistent coordination with social services in all cases in which emergency holds may be necessary.

In addition, stakeholders observed that agency caseworkers were aware of the obligation to provide active efforts in cases governed by the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and were knowledgeable about the differences between reasonable and active efforts. Most stakeholders agreed that Leech Lake Tribal Social Services and the agency have developed good working relationships and coordinated services to meet the needs of children and families.

County Self Assessment: Beltrami County Human Services (BCHS) has a number of committees/processes to screen children who are in out-of-home placement or at risk of placement. BCHS utilizes a Rule 5 committee which consists of agency staff, mental health professionals and others regarding the possible placement of children with mental health concerns. The BCHS supervisor also meets with corrections staff on a weekly basis to review

possible corrections placements, and the agency strives to use appropriate therapeutic settings and services.

The most significant barrier to the provision of in-home services is the lack of resources for such services. In times when budgetary constraints are increasing, human services agencies will cut or eliminate those services which are not directly related to the health and well-being of children. To date, the county has not been forced into a position of reducing this service array. In fact, Beltrami County continues to provide in-home services, both directly and through contractual arrangements, with various partner agencies.

Beltrami County Human Services, along with partnering agencies and collaborative partners, have established a wide array of services designed to prevent out-of-home placement. Services include: children’s mental health, supporting services including skills workers, in-home workers, Family Outreach and Support, Early Childhood and Family Education, the Truancy Tracker program, school interventionists, a youth shelter and other programs.

Perhaps the most effective tool used is the philosophy that the tenet of “active efforts” under ICWA are not just effective for American Indian children and families, but is a “best practice” modality that provides for the least restrictive family-based services for all children within their community.

Summary: Item 3 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Information across data sources was consistent and indicated positive practices in the area of preventing placement when possible and appropriate.

Item 4. Risk of harm to child(ren)

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 4 was applicable in all 12 cases reviewed. Risk of harm to children identified whether their safety was the primary concern in the case and examines how the agency managed the risk that necessitated continued out-of-home placement or services to an intact family. In assessing Item 4 the reviewers determined whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to reduce the risk of harm to the children in each case. The assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 4 was rated a Strength in three of four in-home cases and all eight placement cases, or 91.7 percent of applicable cases.
- Item 4 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in one applicable case (8.3 percent).

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength when services targeted the identified risks with the goal of reducing them. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that services were not provided, or the services were not adequate to manage the risk of harm that necessitated continued out-of-home placement or services to an intact family.

The assessment of Item 4 also identified the following:

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
During the period under review, there was a risk of harm to the child(ren) that necessitated the provision of services to the family or placement of the children in foster care:	12	0	0
When there was risk of harm to the children, sufficient efforts were made by the agency to reduce or remove the risk of harm through specific interventions:	12	0	0
The agency completed an initial risk assessment:	10	0	2
The initial risk level assigned was: Low - 2 cases Moderate - 1 case High - 6 cases Intensive – 1 case			
The agency conducted risk re-assessments:	8	1	3
The most recent risk level in comparison to the initial risk level: Decreased - 5 cases Remained the same - 3 cases Increased – 0 cases			
There were indications that case decisions and planning for removal of children from the home or reunification were based on concerns about children’s health and safety:	11	0	1

Summary of Case Review Findings: The cases reviewed involved families with multiple and complex issues. Generally, once a case was opened by the agency, efforts to manage risk of harm for children were comprehensive and addressed the identified needs. A variety of assessments and full range of services (including extensive chemical dependency services) were provided to support parents and children in the home and, when necessary, out-of-home resources were used to protect children. Examples of ways in which the agency managed risk of harm to children included: obtaining protective supervision of children remaining in their homes, use of Trial Home Visits to aid in monitoring risk, and proceeding to alternative permanency dispositions when it became apparent that reunification presented too great a risk of harm. In some cases, reviewers noted the use of risk re-assessment tools to monitor risk, but this was inconsistent across cases.

In the one case rated as Area Needing Improvement, the agency had provided services that targeted some, but not all, of the identified needs. The agency had an extensive history with this particular family, and there were issues identified through earlier contacts that had not been fully explored or addressed during the agency’s recent involvement with the family.

Stakeholder Interviews: Several stakeholders commented that the county had a very effective child protection team that had helped to build a strong community child protection system. The team was viewed as a good vehicle for discussing cases and relevant child protection rules, statutes and practices. Leech Lake Tribal Social Services was a regular participant on the team, and Red Lake Family and Children’s Services had been invited to child protection team meetings, but was unable to attend.

One particular issue noted was in regard to the use of car seats. Foster parents commented that they were required to complete car seat training and use car seats when transporting children. They described situations where law enforcement, social workers and birth parents transported children without using proper car seats. However, other stakeholders indicated that proper car seats were available to, and consistently used by, professionals.

Stakeholders recognized that the agency was working with families that had multiple and complex issues. They identified some service gaps in the county including timely access to parental capacity evaluations and parenting skills development and support groups. Overall, stakeholders indicated that agency staffs were proficient at identifying and accessing needed services.

County Self Assessment: Beltrami County has a very active and vibrant community of citizens interested in the welfare of children. BCHS works closely with a host of partner agencies and collaboratives. These include the Child Protection Council which includes mental health providers, primary care physicians, law enforcement, corrections, nursing services and others. Input from these partner organizations is vital to the improvement of county practice and procedure. Information is used to continually update and improve the delivery of services to children and families.

Cases are increasing in complexity due to increased methamphetamine utilization, increased sexual abuse cases, and the cases involving fetal alcohol syndrome/effect.

Structured Decision Making (SDM) is not a system that is well-accepted by county social workers. They feel that the tool is not well-developed. The tool is primarily used by investigative staff, in relation to risk assessments. SDM is used to examine safety factors and to help a family participate in the development of their case plan.

Summary: Item 4 was assigned a rating of Strength. Information was consistent across data sources and, overall, the agency has sufficient practices in place to identify risks of harm, and the ability to target those identified risks through specific service interventions.

EVALUATING THE FINDINGS: PERMANENCY

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.

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 1

Permanency Outcome 1 evaluated multiple entries into foster care. It evaluated placement stability, the child’s permanency goal and any barriers to achieving the goal. It also addressed independent living services for eligible children. Last, it measured the progress toward goal achievement, whether it is reunification, adoption or another court-approved goal. To be in substantial conformity, the outcome must have been rated as substantially achieved in 90 percent of the cases reviewed, plus the county data indicators must have met national standards.

With 62.5 percent of the cases rated as substantially achieved, Beltrami County did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. In addition, Beltrami County met three of four national standards.

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.				
Number of cases reviewed according to degree of outcome achievement:				
	Total Number	Total Percentage		
Substantially achieved:	6	62.5%		
Partially achieved:	2	37.5%		
Not achieved or addressed:	0	0%		
Not applicable:	0	--		
Conformity of county data indicators with national standards:				
	National Standard	County’s Percentage	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard
Foster care re-entries	8.6%	6.7%	X	
Length of time to achieve reunification	76.2%	78.1%	X	
Length of time to achieve adoption	32.0%	12.5%		X
Stability of foster care placements	86.7%	89.3%	X	

Item 5. Foster care re-entries

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 5 was applicable in five of eight cases reviewed. Foster care re-entries examined the child’s placement history, specifically any discharges from foster care that were followed by a return to foster care for the same general reasons within 12 months. The results of the assessment were as follows:

- Item 5 was rated a Strength in all five applicable cases (100 percent).
- Item 5 was Not Applicable in three cases.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength if, during the period under review, the child did not re-enter care within 12 months of being discharged from a previous entry into foster care. The item was also rated a Strength if a re-entry was an isolated incident and the agency did what was reasonable to manage the risk following reunification but the child re-entered care for another reason. Cases were Not Applicable when the child entered foster care before, and remained in foster care during the period under review; or the child entered foster care before, and exited foster care during the period under review, and there was not another entry during the period under review.

The assessment of Item 5 also identified the following:

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
The child entered care at least once during the period under review:	5	3	0
When the child entered care during the period under review, the entry was within 12 months of a previous discharge from care:	0	5	3
Multiple entries into care were due to the same reason:	0	0	8

Summary of Case Review Findings: In two of the applicable cases, the most recent entry into out-of-home placement was the children’s sole entry. In three cases, the children had been in previous placements, but discharge from those placements occurred well outside of 12 months from the most recent entry. There were some positive examples noted of cases remaining open after reunification had occurred to provide continued support for successful reunification.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders did not comment on this issue.

County Self Assessment: Beltrami County met the national standard for foster care re-entry.

Summary: Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Information on this item was limited mainly to case reviews, through which positive practices to prevent re-entry were identified. Beltrami County did meet the national standard for foster care re-entry in 2004.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 6 was applicable in all eight cases reviewed. The stability of foster care placement referred to the extent to which the child’s current placement was determined to be free from the risk of an unplanned disruption, or a move not directly related to achieving permanency. In assessing Item 6, reviewers determined whether the child experienced multiple placement settings during the period under review, and if so, whether the changes were necessary to achieve permanency or meet the child’s needs. The results of the assessment were as follows:

- Item 6 was assigned a rating of Strength in four cases (50 percent).
- Item 6 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in four cases (50 percent).

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item if, during the period under review, the child was in two or less placement settings or the changes in placement were consistent with the case plan goals, and the current placement was considered stable. Cases were assigned a rating of

Area Needing Improvement when the child experienced changes in placements not directly related to helping the child achieve the goals of the case plan; or there was indication that the current placement was not stable.

The assessment of Item 6 also identified the following:

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
The child remained in the same placement setting throughout the current or most recent episode of care:	2	6	
All of the placement changes during the period under review occurred for reasons directly related to helping the child achieve the goals of his/her case plan:	2	4	2
The current or most recent placement setting was stable:	6	2	

Number of placement settings the child was in during the period under review	Number of Cases
1	2
2	1
3	3
4	1
5 or more	1

Summary of Case Review Findings: In two cases rated as a Strength, the children had remained in the same setting throughout their placement in out-of-home care. In the other two cases rated as a Strength, one child was in two placement settings, and the other was in three settings during the period under review. In both of these cases, the moves were determined to be consistent with the children’s goals, and necessary to stabilize medical, behavioral and mental health issues. Stability was noted in both relative and non-relative placement settings.

In all four cases rated as Areas Needing Improvement, the children experienced multiple moves during the period under review that were not directly related to helping them achieve their case plan goals. Two children were in three placement settings and one was in four settings during the period under review. The other child was in six different settings within a five month timeframe. Changes in placement occurred for various reasons, with the majority of changes occurring due to foster parent request or a child’s delinquent behavior. Instability was noted in both relative and non-relative placement settings.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders indicated that foster parents had access to quality training and had input into training topics. Most foster parents indicated that non-emergency placements were well-planned and foster parents received necessary information prior to placement. Foster parents spoke highly of the support that they received from agency staff, including the licensing and placing caseworkers. Agency caseworkers were described as being responsive to the needs of foster parents.

Stakeholders had varied observations regarding the level of matching that occurs when children were placed in out-of-home care. Some felt that the agency was very thoughtful about this

process, and consideration was given to the needs of the child and the strengths of the foster care providers. Other stakeholders thought that taking more time to assess children's needs, and then matching them with the caregiver most capable of meeting those needs, would result in increased stability for children in foster care. Additionally, stakeholders commented that the agency followed tribal recommendations for placement preferences and some stakeholders commented that those placements may have had a higher tendency toward instability.

There were numerous observations regarding the stability of relative foster care placements. Some stakeholders observed that placement with a relative contributed to placement stability. Others noted that relative placements were less stable for children. Tribal representatives requested that they be contacted prior to relative placements of tribal children, and that this may have a positive impact on stability. Other stakeholders indicated that situations in which the tribe had not been notified prior to a placement were likely emergency placements made by law enforcement personnel.

Until fairly recently, the reimbursement for relative and non-relative foster care services varied greatly. Non-relative foster care providers received the reimbursement at the state's foster care per diem rate, and relative foster care providers were referred to the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), which resulted in lower reimbursement. Stakeholders supported the practice of paying relative foster parents the full foster care monthly rate rather than referring them to MFIP for reimbursement. In addition to this being a legal requirement, the increased financial support to relative caregivers may contribute to increased foster care stability. Stakeholders also differed in their observations regarding the level of other, non-financial support that relative foster care providers receive in comparison to non-relative foster care providers.

County Self Assessment: Beltrami County met the national standard for stability of foster care placement. The agency provides training for all foster parents on a regular basis and provides for child care/respite as needed. Training topics include issues relevant to the needs of foster parents as determined through regular meetings with them, and through meetings with regional foster care licensing workers. Trainings are conducted through two-hour in-services every other month and two six-hour trainings offered in the spring and fall. Pre-service training is also provided in foster parents' homes.

Summary: Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. There was some inconsistency across data sources. While the county met the national standard in 2004, there were stability issues identified in the case review and by stakeholders. A thorough evaluation of all the agency's support services to maintain placement stability in both relative and non-relative placements is indicated. Relevant data sources did consistently identify foster parent training as a strength.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 7 was applicable in all eight cases reviewed. This item focused on establishing the most appropriate permanency goal for the child. In

assessing Item 7, reviewers determined whether the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for children in a timely manner. The results of this assessment were as follows:

- Item 7 was rated a Strength in seven cases (87.5 percent).
- Item 7 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in one case (12.5 percent).

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength when reviewers determined that the permanency goal was appropriate and the goal was established in a timely manner. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the agency did not establish a permanency goal in a timely manner, or that the permanency goal did not seem well suited to the child’s unique circumstances.

**The assessment of Item 7 also identified the following:
Children had the following permanency goals:**

	Reunification	Transfer of custody to a relative	Adoption	Long-term foster care
Primary Goal:	5	2	1	0
Secondary Goal:	0	2	0	3

The following processes were utilized to establish permanency goals for children:

	Number of Cases:
Concurrent Permanency Planning:	3
Family Group Decision Making:	2
Permanency Planning Teams:	1

	Yes	No	NA	
The child entered care as a result of a Child in Need of Protection or Services (CHIPS) petition (including 72-hour holds):	7	1		
A permanency progress review was held within six months for a child under 8 years old:	1	2	5	
A permanency hearing was held within 12 months of the child’s entry into care (children of all ages):	3	2	3	
	Yes		No	
The permanency goal was appropriately matched to the child’s individual needs for permanency and stability:	8		0	
	Yes	No	NA	Exception Noted
The agency filed a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) petition when the child had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, or met other Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requirements:	1	1	6	0

Summary of Case Review Findings: In six cases, children in the care and custody of the agency had permanency goals that matched their needs. In a number of cases, the agency had established appropriate concurrent permanency goals. In addition, the agency utilized Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) in two cases to aid them in establishing the most appropriate

permanency goal. In one case, it was specifically noted that the agency was responsive to the child's input when establishing the permanency goal.

In the one case rated an Area Needing Improvement, the child had been in care for 16 of the most recent 22 months, and had a permanency goal of reunification. The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requires that a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) petition be filed when a child has been in care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. In such cases, the court has the discretion to note an exception to the TPR requirement. In the case reviewed, the agency had filed a permanency petition requesting long-term foster care, but the court removed the child from the permanency petition because there was not an identified permanency home for the child. This is not one of the allowable exceptions under ASFA. The goal for this child remained reunification even though there were no plans to reunify the child. A search for other permanency resources continued.

In addition, it is significant to note that timely permanency progress review hearings were held in one of three applicable cases; and permanency proceedings were commenced within required timelines in three of five applicable cases.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders observed that cases were consistently reviewed in court at least once every 90 days. The court followed the one judge/one family model whenever possible, and district court judges issued scheduling orders immediately after the Emergency Protective Care (EPC) hearing that included the schedule of required hearings all the way through to the permanency hearing. Stakeholders observed that transfer of permanent legal and physical custody to a relative was the most common permanency goal when reunification was not an option. In addition, they indicated that concurrent permanency plans were developed when appropriate.

Stakeholders recognized that Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) could be a useful process in helping to establish the most appropriate permanency goal for a child, and that recently the agency had taken advantage of FGDM for permanency planning. Stakeholders also stated that they have had mixed experiences with FGDM and expressed some concern that contracted FGDM facilitators lacked experience and the necessary facilitation skills. Some thought that use of FGDM earlier in a case would increase achievement of desired outcomes.

Overall, stakeholders observed that the county worked in consultation with tribal social services to establish permanency goals for children. Customary adoptions were viewed as a positive permanency option for American Indian children. Joint training regarding customary adoptions for county and tribal workers, along with other professionals involved in ICWA cases, was encouraged.

County Self Assessment: The county self assessment did not specifically address practices in this area.

Summary: Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In general, positive practices were identified regarding the establishment of appropriate permanency goals for children.

Item 8. Reunification or transfer of permanent legal and physical custody to a relative

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement _____

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 8 was applicable in seven of eight cases reviewed. This item focused on achieving permanency. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the agency achieved the goal in a timely manner or, if not, whether the agency was making diligent efforts to achieve the goal. The results of this assessment were as follows:

- Item 8 was rated a Strength in three applicable cases (42.9 percent).
- Item 8 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in four applicable cases (57.1 percent).
- Item 8 was Not Applicable in one case.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength when reviewers determined that the agency had achieved the goal in a timely manner or had taken appropriate measures to achieve the goal. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that there were unnecessary delays in attaining the goal and/or efforts to attain the goal were not sufficient. Cases were Not Applicable when the permanency goal was something other than reunification or transfer of custody to relatives.

The assessment of Item 8 also identified the following:

- Five children had permanency goals of reunification. Two children had primary or back-up permanency goals of permanent transfer of legal and physical custody to a relative.

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
The permanency goal was achieved within 12 months of the child’s most recent entry into care (within 14 months for a child who initially entered care on a Voluntary Placement Agreement):	2	2	4
For a child who was in care less than 12 or 14 months, steps were in place to achieve the permanency goal within this timeframe:	1	2	5

Summary of Case Review Findings: In one case, the child’s goal of reunification was achieved within five months. In another case, a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody to a relative was achieved within 13 months. In this same case, the child had been in foster care for eight and a half months, and the additional time was spent in a relative’s home with court approval. In another case, the child had been in care for just over eight months and steps were in place for reunification to be achieved within the 12-month timeframe.

In two cases noted as areas needing improvement, both children had been in care for over 12 months, and achievement of reunification did not appear likely in the near future. In one of those cases, the agency had filed a permanency petition, but the identified permanency resource changed their mind and permanency was not established. In two other cases noted as areas needing improvement, both children have been in out-of-home care for just under 12 months. In one case, the child had been in care for 11 months. The court granted a six-month extension to the permanency timelines, but the parental situation was not stable due to long-term chemical use and mental health issues, and reunification was not likely to occur in the near future. In the other case, the child had been in care for 10 months, and the permanency

goal had recently been changed to transfer of custody to a relative. However, there was no permanency resource identified for the child and it was unlikely that the goal would be achieved within the next two months.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders were in agreement that agency caseworkers consistently made reasonable and/or active efforts to promote timely reunification. This included timely referrals of parents to services designed to increase their abilities to meet the safety needs of their children. Stakeholders also agreed that the district court was well aware and considerate of permanency timelines and, when appropriate, granted extensions to permanency timelines. Some stakeholders observed that the court was more likely to grant extensions in ICWA cases.

Foster parents indicated that they were aware of the agency's requirement to attempt reunification. While they have not always agreed, they have accepted those decisions and were resolved to doing the best they could for children while they were in their care.

Stakeholders also observed that delays in the transfer of permanent legal and physical custody had occurred, particularly when Termination of Parental Rights was not an option, and relatives capable or willing to assume long-term care responsibilities had not been identified.

County Self Assessment: Beltrami County met the national standard for reunification.

Permanency plans are incorporated into case plans when cases are opened. The court schedules the permanency date at the initial hearing. Hearings are very effective in promoting timely and appropriate achievement of all permanency goals.

Summary: Item 8 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. There was some inconsistency across data sources.

Item 9. Adoption

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 9 was applicable in one of eight cases reviewed. This item focused on achieving a finalized adoption within 24 months of the child's most recent entry into foster care. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether appropriate and timely efforts had been, or were being, undertaken to achieve finalized adoptions. The results of the assessment were as follows:

- Item 9 was rated a Strength in the one applicable case (100 percent).
- Item 9 was Not Applicable in seven cases.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item when reviewers determined that the agency had initiated the necessary steps to move the child toward adoption within 24 months of foster care placement. Cases were Not Applicable when the permanency goal was something other than adoption.

The assessment of Item 9 also identified the following:

- In one case, the child had a primary goal of adoption.

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
Adoptions were finalized within 24 months of the child's most recent entry into care:	0	1	7
For a child in care for less than 24 months, steps were in place to finalize the adoption within the 24-month timeframe:	0	0	8

Summary of Case Review Findings: In the one case in which the current permanency goal was adoption, the child has been in care for 36 months without achievement of the adoption goal. However, there had been changes in the permanency goal based upon input from the child. The goal had been adoption earlier on in the case, and then the child signed an affidavit indicating that s/he did not want to be adopted. Later, the child again expressed a desire to be adopted. The agency appropriately responded to the child's input and again began the adoption process. The reasons for the delay in the adoption were significant, resulting in this item being rated a Strength, even though an adoption had not occurred within the 24-month timeframe.

Stakeholder Interviews: As referenced earlier in this report, stakeholders viewed customary adoption as a positive permanency option for American Indian children. Cases involving customary adoption including Leech Lake tribal members are referred to White Earth Tribal Court for finalization.

Stakeholders indicated that requests for transfer of venue to tribal court has sometimes occurred late in a court case, which has led to delays in the finalization of adoptions. Stakeholders recognized that customary adoption is a relatively new permanency option for children and, as referenced earlier in this report, both tribal and county staff expressed an interest in joint training in this area.

Stakeholders reported that county foster parents have adopted children placed in their care when reunification was not a viable permanency option.

County Self Assessment: Beltrami County does not meet, and will likely never meet, national standards for adoptions. The agency works within the Indian Child Welfare Act and most of the children they serve are American Indian. Tribal governments do not support adoptions. The self assessment also identified that customary adoptions are utilized to achieve permanency plans. The agency contracts for applicable adoption services through the Public/Private Adoption Initiative.

Summary: Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Information across data sources was fairly consistent. All data sources identified delays in the achievement of adoption, particularly in ICWA cases. However, the case review and stakeholder interviews also reflected that the agency makes diligent and consistent efforts to achieve adoption goals. Because the county did not meet the national standard for achievement of adoption, this is an area that will be addressed in their Program Improvement Plan.

Item 10. Permanency goal of long-term foster care

Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 10 was not applicable in any of the cases reviewed. This item regarding a permanency goal of long-term foster care focused on achieving permanency. In assessing this item, reviewers determined the appropriateness of the goal that rules out adoption, transfer of custody to relatives or reunification; assessed whether the child’s best interests were thoroughly considered; and assessed whether efforts to attain long-term foster care were effective. The results of this assessment were as follows:

- Item 10 was Not Applicable in all eight cases.

Cases were Not Applicable when the permanency goal was adoption, transfer of custody to relatives or reunification.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders did not provide any comments specific to the achievement of long-term foster care. However, stakeholders viewed the process for conducting six-month administrative reviews as helpful in that the reviews provided an opportunity for families and professionals to be aware of, and at times, affect case decisions.

County Self Assessment: Long-term foster care is not considered a permanency option for children. The agency reviews all cases where foster placement was needed and relative searches never end.

Permanency plans are incorporated into case plans when cases are first opened. The court schedules a permanency date at the initial hearing. Hearings are very effective in promoting timely and appropriate achievement of all permanency goals.

The agency also holds regular administrative reviews for all placements with all parties, including custodial and non-custodial parents.

Summary: Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of Not Applicable. Long-term foster care is viewed as the least desirable and least permanent option for children who cannot safely return to their parental homes. Having no applicable cases selected in the random sample is viewed, systemically, as a Strength. Both stakeholders and the county self assessment identified the six-month administrative review process as an effective way to continually monitor the appropriateness of permanency goals.

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2

Permanency Outcome 2 evaluated the proximity of foster care placement to the child’s parents; visitation among parents, children and siblings; and efforts to preserve and maintain the child’s connections to their neighborhood, community, family and friends. In order to achieve substantial conformity on Permanency Outcome 2, the outcome must have been rated as substantially achieved in 90 percent of the cases reviewed. With 75 percent of the cases reviewed rated as substantially achieved, Beltrami County did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2.

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.		
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:		
	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially achieved:	6	75%
Partially achieved:	2	25%
Not achieved or addressed:	0	0%
Not applicable:	0	--

Item 11. Proximity of foster care

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 11 was applicable in seven of eight cases reviewed. Proximity of foster care placement refers to the location of the child’s placement in relation to the parents’ residence. In assessing Item 11, reviewers determined whether the child’s foster care setting was close to the child’s parents or relatives. In addition, the reviewers determined the general accessibility of the child. The results of the assessment were as follows:

- Item 11 was rated a Strength in all seven applicable cases (100 percent).
- Item 11 was Not Applicable in one case.

Cases were rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child was placed in the same community or county as their family of origin, or the child was placed out of the county to meet their needs or to be placed with relatives. Cases were Not Applicable when the parents’ whereabouts were unknown, the parents were deceased, or parental rights were terminated with no planned involvement in case planning or goals.

The assessment of Item 11 also identified the following:

	Same Community	Same County	Out of County	Out of State	NA
The proximity of the child’s placement to their parents:	3	1	3	0	1

- In all three cases in which the children were placed outside of the county of their parents’ residence, the reason for the location of the placement was clearly related to helping the children achieve their case plan goals.

Summary of Case Review Findings: In four cases, the children were placed in the same community or county as their parents’ residence. In the remaining three cases, the children were placed outside of their parents’ county of residence. However, two of those children were placed in a neighboring county, one in a relative’s home in close proximity to their parents. In the other case in which the child was placed outside the county, the placement location was farther away, but appropriate to meet the needs of the child. The child was placed in a therapeutic Native American home that was capable of meeting the child’s treatment and cultural needs.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders observed that, when children were in need of out-of-home placement, agency caseworkers made efforts to identify relatives willing and able to care for the children. This generally increased the likelihood that children were placed in close proximity to their parents' home.

Stakeholders indicated that the county has less than 15 licensed non-relative foster homes, when at times there had been close to 25 homes. Stakeholders believed that training requirements had resulted in diminished numbers of foster homes, and that there was a lack of staff and financial resources for training and recruitment. Other stakeholders commented that foster parents had access to quality training and the training needs of foster parents were met.

County Self Assessment: Beltrami County has a thriving foster care community. BCHS recruits and trains foster parents as does PATH, NorthHomes, Leech Lake and Red Lake. BCHS utilizes the full array of homes to meet the needs of children.

Summary: Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Data sources consistently identified agency practices aimed at keeping children in their home communities and the same county as their parents.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement _____ Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 12 was applicable in four of eight cases reviewed. Placement with siblings refers to efforts 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. In assessing Item 12, reviewers determined whether siblings were, or had been, placed together, and if not, whether separation was necessary to meet the needs of one or more of the children. The results of the assessment were as follows:

- Item 12 was rated a Strength in two applicable cases (50 percent).
- Item 12 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in two applicable cases (50 percent).
- Item 12 was Not Applicable in four cases.

Cases were rated as a Strength if a child was in the same placement setting as at least one other sibling, or a child was placed separately from siblings to meet the needs of the individual child. Cases were also rated a Strength when there was a large sibling group placed separately, but they were able to maintain close, regular contact. Cases were rated as Area Needing Improvement when siblings were placed separately due to the lack of placement resources. Cases were Not Applicable when there were no siblings in foster care.

The assessment of Item 12 also identified the following:

- In four cases, the child had siblings who were also in foster care.
- In two cases, a sibling group of two was in foster care; in one case, a sibling group of three was in foster care; and in one case, a sibling group of four was in foster care.

	Placed with all siblings who are in foster care	Placed with one or more siblings in foster care	Placed apart from all siblings in foster care	NA	
Location of the child and his/her siblings who were also in foster care:	1	0	3	4	
			Yes	No	NA
For siblings placed separately in foster care, there was clear evidence that separation was necessary to meet the needs of the child:			1	2	5
The agency was making efforts to reunite siblings placed separately in foster care when appropriate:			1	2	5

Summary of Case Review Findings: In some cases, the agency successfully made efforts to place sibling groups together in out-of-home care. In one case, a sibling group of three was placed together in a relative’s home. In another case, a sibling group of two had initially been placed together, but the behavior of one of the siblings necessitated a more restrictive placement setting. The sibling relationship was maintained through visits, and the efforts of the agency and the foster parents.

In one case rated as Area Needing Improvement, two siblings were placed in separate homes. There was not clear evidence that the separation was necessary and the separation was due more to a lack of community resources. Efforts have been made to enable the siblings to maintain contact. The other case rated as Area Needing Improvement involved a sibling group of four placed in three separate locations. While the siblings were maintaining contact with each other, there was no evidence of agency plans to reunite the siblings.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders observed that agency caseworkers made concerted efforts to place siblings together whenever possible and appropriate. However, they identified that local foster care resources were limited, and sometimes presented a barrier to siblings being placed together. Stakeholders also indicated that the court inquired about the placement of siblings together, and ensured that the agency was making efforts to reunite siblings who had been placed separately. In addition, stakeholders indicated that placement with relatives contributed to siblings being able to remain together.

County Self Assessment: The self assessment did not specifically address this issue.

Summary: Item 12 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Information from the two available data sources, case reviews and stakeholder interviews, were consistent. Both identified that the agency makes efforts to place sibling groups together in out-of-home care, but a barrier to that was the availability of local resources.

Item 13. Visits with parents and siblings in foster care

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement _____ Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 13 was applicable in seven of eight cases reviewed. This item refers to the typical pattern of visitation between parents and their child placed in foster care, and the typical pattern of visitation among siblings placed separately in foster care. The assessment of this item took into account visitation patterns with both parents of the child in foster care. Reviewers determined whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to facilitate visitation between parents and their child, between siblings in foster care, and whether the frequency of visits was sufficient to meet the child’s needs. The results of the assessment were as follows:

- Item 13 was rated a Strength in five applicable cases (71.4 percent).
- Item 13 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in two applicable cases (28.6 percent).
- Item 13 was Not Applicable in one case.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item if, during the period under review, the frequency of visits between the child in foster care and their mother, father and siblings was sufficient to meet the child’s needs, or if visits were not of sufficient frequency, that the agency had made diligent efforts to promote visitation. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the typical pattern and frequency of visitation was not adequate to meet the needs of the child and/or that agency efforts to promote and support visitation were not sufficient. Cases were Not Applicable when there were circumstances under which visitation was contrary to the child’s safety or best interest.

The assessment of Item 13 also identified the following:

The following chart identifies the most typical pattern of face-to-face visitation between a child and their parents and a child and siblings placed separately in foster care:

	Weekly	Bi-weekly	Monthly	Less than Monthly	No Visits	NA
Mothers:	2	2	1	2	0	1
Fathers:	0	0	0	0	2	6
Siblings Placed Separately:	1	1	1	0	0	5

		Yes	No	NA
There were other forms of contact between the child and his/her family members:	Mothers:	6	0	2
	Fathers:	0	2	6
	Siblings Placed Separately:	3	0	5
The arrangements for frequency of visitation were based on the individual needs of the child and family:		5	2	1

Summary of Case Review Findings: The frequency of visits between children and their parents, and between children and their siblings placed separately, ranged from weekly to less than monthly. In addition, children were more likely to have visits with their mothers than with their fathers. Examples of both supervised and unsupervised visits were noted in the cases reviewed, and there were examples of visits starting out supervised but moving to unsupervised,

when appropriate. Reviewers noted that the agency had made extensive efforts, including providing transportation in a number of cases, to facilitate visits between children and their parents and siblings.

It is important to note that in five of the cases reviewed, the children's permanency goal was reunification. Frequent visitation between parents and children is a key service to promote timely reunification. Multiple visits per week may be necessary to support parent/child bonding and attachment, particularly for younger children.

In both cases noted as areas needing improvement, no visits were occurring between children and their fathers. In one case, reviewers specifically noted that no efforts were made to engage the father or facilitate visits with him. In the other case, supervised visits were court ordered to occur at the discretion of the agency or tribe. However, the foster parent had facilitated unsupervised visitation (including overnight visits) without the approval of the tribe or agency. In one case, it was noted that visits were not allowed due to a child's behavior. This is an area that warrants evaluation by the agency - requiring children to "earn" visits with their parents is inconsistent with state and federal guidelines.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders commented that the agency had been clear with foster parents about visitation expectations. In addition, the role of foster parents in visitation between children and their parents varied, and was dependent upon the foster parent. Caseworkers provided foster parents with clear visitation plans, and invited input from foster parents regarding their needs and level of comfort. Some foster parents facilitated visitation with birth parents in the foster home, while other foster parents provided transportation to and from visits.

Stakeholders observed that the court generally left the frequency of visitation to the discretion of the agency. Some would like to see more specificity in court orders that address visitation. Decisions on whether or not visits were supervised were made on a case-by-case basis and were based on the safety needs of children. They also identified that agency caseworkers made efforts to identify and contact non-custodial parents, and involved them in visitation with their children.

Stakeholders consistently identified a need for a local visitation center that would allow for more frequent and flexible visitation. Due to a lack of social worker time to supervise visits, some stakeholders indicated that supervised visits generally occurred once a week for one hour. In addition, supervised visits typically occurred in the social services building, and stakeholders identified transportation as a barrier to visits for parents.

County Self Assessment: The self assessment did not specifically address this issue.

Summary: Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. There were some inconsistencies across sources of information. Overall, agency caseworkers made diligent efforts to facilitate and support visitation between parents and their children in foster care. Additional attention to facilitating visitation with non-custodial parents and ensuring that foster parents are clear on visitation expectations appears warranted.

Item 14. Preserving connections

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 14 was applicable in all eight cases reviewed. Preserving a child’s primary connections includes their relationships with previous foster families, schools, friends, communities, tribes/tribal customs, and religion/religious observances. In assessing Item 14, reviewers determined whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to preserve the child’s primary connections while the child was in foster care. The results of this assessment were as follows:

- Item 14 was rated a Strength in all eight cases (100 percent).

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength when reviewers determined that the child’s primary connections had been significantly preserved while in foster care.

The assessment of Item 14 also identified the following:

	Significantly	Partially	Not at All
The primary connections of the child were being preserved in the foster care placement:	6	2	0

The interests of American Indian children were being addressed through:

	Yes	No	NA
Timely notification of the tribe:	8	0	0
Placement with the child’s extended family or tribe:	8	0	0

Summary of Case Review Findings: In all cases, the agency made considerable efforts to preserve important connections for children in foster care; all of whom were American Indian children. Some children were placed with relatives when it was determined to be in their best interest, and all children were placed in homes approved by the tribes. This was key to preserving the children’s connections to their culture and heritage. Children were encouraged to have contact with supportive extended family, and continue involvement in culturally relevant activities. Reviewers noted involvement of tribal social workers in planning for children, which also contributed to the preservation of cultural connections.

Stakeholder Interviews: Frequently, stakeholders observed good cooperation between the Beltrami County Human Services staff and the Leech Lake Tribal Social Services staff. Tribal staff indicated that the agency was, overall, consistent with following placement preferences, and partnered with tribal staff in planning for children. Stakeholders appreciated Leech Lake staff’s attendance at district court hearings. Red Lake Tribal Family and Children’s Services staff also participated in district court hearings. In addition, expert testimony from tribal representatives was routinely requested and provided in district court. The county was also described as being respectful and responsive to requests for transfer of cases to tribal court.

Stakeholders expressed an interest in establishing consistent case consultation meetings between the county and both Leech Lake and Red Lake tribal social service agencies. The relationship

between Leech Lake and the county was generally positive, and the agency continued to address collaboration with Red Lake.

County Self Assessment: Beltrami County Human Services is in full compliance with ICWA and utilizes ICWA principles in the provision of services to all children. Services are provided from a perspective of cultural relevance. Recruitment of foster care homes, for example, targets the continued need for American Indian options for children when relatives cannot be located. BCHS, in collaboration with their partners such as North Homes and Leech Lake Family Services, provides culturally aware staff as needed and appropriate.

While BCHS does have a few American Indian homes, they are limited on this resource. In the past they have attempted to recruit homes with limited success.

Summary: Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Information received from all three data sources was generally consistent. Partnering with tribal staff is key to the preservation of connections for children. The county consistently provides notification to the tribes as required by ICWA, and follows the outlined placement preferences.

Item 15. Relative placement

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 15 was applicable in seven of eight cases reviewed. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives, both maternal and paternal, as potential placement resources for the child when they entered foster care. The results of this assessment were as follows:

- Item 15 was rated as a Strength in six applicable cases (85.7 percent).
- Item 15 was rated as Area Needing Improvement in one applicable case (14.3 percent).
- Item 15 was Not Applicable in one case.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item when reviewers determined that the child was already placed with relatives, or that the agency had made diligent efforts to locate relatives and assess them as potential placement resources. Cases were rated as Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the agency had not made sufficient efforts to explore the possibility of relative placements or when the agency had conducted only limited exploration of potential relative placements.

The assessment of Item 15 also identified the following:

- Children were placed with relatives in four of the cases reviewed.

	Yes	No	NA	
For a child not placed with relatives, both maternal and paternal relatives were identified and considered for placement of the child:	Maternal:	3	1	4
	Paternal:	2	2	4
For a child not placed with relatives, the agency made ongoing efforts to identify and assess relatives as placement resources:	3	1	4	

Summary of Case Review Findings: The case reviews reflected some strong practice in this area. In four cases, children were in placement with relatives. In three of those cases, the children had been in multiple placement settings, the majority of which were with relatives. In two cases, extensive relative searches of both maternal and paternal relatives were completed, but there were no relatives available to provide care.

In the one case noted as needing improvement, a search of maternal relatives had occurred, but not a search of paternal relatives. In this case the father's parental rights had been terminated.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders consistently identified that agency caseworkers made diligent efforts to identify and place children with relatives; and the search for relatives began with the assessment/investigation workers. However, they expressed concern that children had been placed with relatives without the agency having had adequate time to assess the relatives' ability to provide care for the child, and this led to unplanned disruptions in placements. Leech Lake representatives encouraged the agency to contact them prior to the placement of Leech Lake children with relatives, including situations of emergency placement, as they may be able to provide additional information on the ability of the relatives to provide care. Red Lake tribal social services staff expressed an interest in more collaboration with the county when conducting relative searches.

Some stakeholders also expressed concern about the emergency foster care licensing process for relatives. They thought that the requirements for relatives in emergency situations were too minimal and ineffective for identifying issues that may later prohibit the relatives from completing the full licensing process. In addition, they thought the requirements for licensing relatives were too time consuming, particularly when there were a number of relatives pursuing licensure for the same child(ren).

County Self Assessment: Being a county with a high percentage of American Indian children, Beltrami County uses relative foster care whenever possible as prescribed through the active efforts clause of ICWA. The search for relatives never ends.

Summary: Item 15 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. While there were some concerns expressed by stakeholders regarding the relative search and relative licensing processes, data sources consistently identified that the agency made efforts to place children with relatives. Beltrami County's percentage of children in relative foster care in 2004 was more than double the state average.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 16 was applicable in seven of eight cases reviewed. This item focused on the nature of the parent/child relationship and agency efforts to support a positive relationship during the period under review. In assessing this item, the reviewers determined whether the agency had made diligent efforts to promote and/or maintain

the bond between the child and both parents through visitation and the provision of services. The results of this assessment were as follows:

- Item 16 was rated a Strength in six applicable cases (85.7 percent).
- Item 16 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in one applicable case (14.3 percent).
- Item 16 was Not Applicable in one case.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength when reviewers determined that the agency had provided services designed to promote and/or maintain bonding between parents and their child. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the agency had not supported sufficient visitation or made other active efforts to promote and maintain the parent/child relationship. Cases were Not Applicable when a relationship with a parent was contrary to the child’s safety or best interests.

The assessment of Item 16 also identified the following:

		Number of cases:		
		Yes	No	NA
There was evidence of a strong, emotionally supportive relationship between the child in foster care and their parents:	Mothers:	5	2	1
	Fathers:	0	3	5
Where appropriate, the agency made efforts to promote or maintain a strong, emotionally supportive relationship between the child in foster care and their parents:	Mothers:	7	0	1
	Fathers:	0	1	7
Visits and other contact between the child and their parents were planned and carried out in a manner that supported the parent/child relationship:	Mothers:	7	0	1
	Fathers:	0	2	6

Summary of Case Review Findings: Overall, the agency supported and promoted parent/child relationships by placing children with relatives and facilitating visits between children and their parents. In addition to visits, phone contact between children and parents was encouraged when appropriate. The agency may wish to assess how parents can be included in more of the day-to-day activities of their child’s life, e.g. participation in medical and school appointments and activities.

In the one case rated as Area Needing Improvement, the agency had made concerted efforts to promote the mother/child relationship, but efforts to assess and/or promote the father/child relationship were lacking.

Stakeholder Interviews: There were no stakeholder observations specific to this item. Stakeholder comments related to Items 13, 14 and 15 are related to this performance item as well.

County Self Assessment: The self assessment did not specifically address this issue. County self assessment data included in Items 13, 14 and 15 are relevant to this item as well.

Summary: Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Practices and efforts to promote and support the parent/child relationship were generally positive. Other performance items, including parent/child visitation, preservation of connections, and relative placements are indicators of the county’s efforts to promote and support the parent/child relationship.

EVALUATING THE FINDINGS: WELL-BEING

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

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1

Well-being Outcome 1 evaluated whether an assessment of needs is made for the children, parents and foster families, and the agency’s response in meeting those needs. It assessed the level of involvement of children and parents in case planning and the frequency of contact with the social worker. To achieve substantial conformity on Well-being Outcome 1, the outcome must have been rated as substantially achieved in 90 percent of the cases reviewed. With 50 percent of the cases reviewed rated as substantially achieved, Beltrami County did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-being Outcome 1.

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.		
Number of cases reviewed according to degree of outcome achievement:		
	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially achieved:	6	50%
Partially achieved:	5	41.7%
Not achieved or addressed:	1	8.3%
Not applicable:	0	--

Item 17. Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 17 was applicable in all 12 cases reviewed. The assessment of this item focused on whether or not the needs of the children, parents and foster parents were adequately assessed and whether or not identified needs were addressed through appropriate services. The results of the assessment were as follows:

- Item 17 was rated a Strength in two of four in-home and five of eight placement cases, or 58.3 percent of applicable cases.
- Item 17 was rated as Area Needing Improvement in five applicable cases (41.7 percent).

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength when reviewers determined that there were no unmet assessment or service needs for children, parents or foster parents. Cases were rated an Area Needing Improvement when the assessment did not address needs of children, parents or foster parents; the assessment of needs was not adequate; or the services to address identified needs were not provided.

The assessment of Item 17 also identified the following:

		Number of Cases:		
		Yes	No	NA
The needs of children, parents and foster parents related to safety, permanency and well-being were adequately assessed and identified:	Children:	10	2	
	Assessment of independent living skills for children over age 16:	0	2	10
	Mothers:	11	0	1
	Fathers:	2	3	7
	Foster parents:	7	1	4
The identified needs of children, parents and foster parents were addressed through appropriate services:	Children:	9	3	0
	Provision of independent living services for children over age 16:	0	2	10
	Mothers:	10	1	1
	Fathers:	1	4	7
	Foster parents:	8	0	4

Summary of Case Review Findings: The performance on assessment of needs and provision of services was fairly even across in-home and placement cases. Assessments included internal use of several formal assessment tools, referrals for formal assessments outside of the agency, and agency caseworkers conducting informal assessments during contact with children, parents and foster parents. The agency frequently arranged for the provision of multiple services to address identified needs, including a wide range of chemical dependency and mental health services. There were also examples of provision of supportive services noted, e.g. respite care and transportation services. In addition, reviewers cited examples of good coordination occurring between the agency and tribal social services and other service providers, resulting in the provision of culturally appropriate services.

There were various reasons for ratings of Areas Needing Improvement. In one of the cases, there was a foster parent financial support issue (the foster parents received payment for only three of the six months for which they provided foster care). In another case, parent needs were adequately assessed, but services were not provided to address ongoing domestic violence issues, and the child’s needs were not adequately assessed. In another case involving a child who recently turned 16 years old, the child’s need for independent living skills had not been assessed. In one case a child with significant issues returned home without any transitional services to help support the child and parent in the reunification. And, in the last case a father’s needs were not assessed.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders commented that families in the child protection system have multiple and complex needs. Agency caseworkers were viewed as being familiar and responsive to the needs of children and families on their caseloads. Stakeholders identified that the needs of families were assessed through formal and informal processes. The collaboration between county and tribal social services was viewed as being key to adequately assessing and providing for families’ needs. Stakeholders viewed this working relationship as essential in order to ensure that services are culturally appropriate. They also observed that the agency has done a good job of identifying non-custodial parents and assessing their needs. There were mixed stakeholder comments regarding the level of support provided to foster parents. Some stakeholders indicated that the agency identified and was responsive to foster parents’ needs;

others observed that the needs of relative foster care providers were not as fully assessed or attended to.

Some of the formal assessment tools available to caseworkers are Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools, including the Risk Assessment and Risk Re-assessment tools, Assessment of Strengths and Needs tool, Safety Assessment and Plan tool and the Reunification tool. Internal agency stakeholders identified inconsistent use of these tools by agency caseworkers. Agency staff completed the tools as required, but did not use the tools to inform their decisions.

Stakeholders identified that the county provided timely chemical health assessments for adults and adolescents involved in CHIPS cases. In addition, they identified that, generally, referrals for formal diagnostic assessments were responded to in a timely manner. Other formal assessments, e.g. parental capacity evaluations, were more difficult to complete in a timely fashion. Some stakeholders believed that there was a need for a parenting skill development and support group, and felt that this would compliment the current in-home services provided through the county. Some expressed concern that, due to financial pressures on the agency, the availability of services for clients was decreasing.

County Self Assessment: Issues relevant to the needs of foster parents are determined through regular meetings with them. Additional county resources, policies, and practices related to this item are described in other areas of this report.

Summary: Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. The rating for Item 17 involved considering significant amounts of information from case reviews and case-related interviews. Case reviews reflect inconsistent practices in conducting thorough assessments and meeting identified needs through the provision of services. More consistency is needed to ensure quality case practice. During the review, the agency discussed the need for additional staff training on the use of Structured Decision Making tools to assist them in assessing needs and case planning.

Item: 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 18 was applicable in all 12 cases reviewed. This item focused on the agency's efforts to involve children and parents in case planning activities to identify needs and services, establish goals and evaluate progress. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether parents and children (if age appropriate) had been involved in the case planning process, and if not, whether their involvement was contrary to the children's best interest. Additionally, the determination was based on active involvement and consideration of input received from children and parents. The results of this assessment were as follows:

- Item 18 was rated a Strength in one of four in-home and six of eight placement cases, or 58.3 percent of applicable cases.
- Item 18 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in five applicable cases (41.7 percent).

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item when reviewers determined that all relevant parties had actively participated in the case planning process. Cases were assigned a

rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that one or more of the key parties had not been involved in the case planning process and/or a case plan was not completed.

The assessment of Item 18 also identified the following:

		Number of Cases:		
		Yes	No	NA
The agency made extensive efforts to involve the parents and children in case planning activities:	Children:	4	4	4
	Mothers:	8	3	1
	Fathers:	1	3	8
The input of the parents and children was actively considered in the development of the case plan:		10	2	0
In placement cases, procedural safeguards were in place with respect to parental rights pertaining to the removal of children from the home, changes in placements and visiting privileges:		7	2	3
A current/written case plan was in the file:		11	1	0
For children age 16 and older in foster care, an Independent Living Skills plan was in the file:		0	2	10

Summary of Case Review Findings: Engagement of appropriate family members in the case planning process was much more significant in placement cases than for in-home cases. In some cases, there were considerable efforts made to engage parents and age appropriate children in case plan development. There were descriptions of creative efforts to engage family members in this process by asking what the families’ strengths were. In addition, coordination with tribal social services and consultation with guardians ad litem were noted as strengths in case plan development.

In all cases noted as needing improvement, one or more family members had not been engaged in the development of the case plan. In four cases, age appropriate children were not engaged in the case planning process; in three cases mothers were not involved; and, in three cases, fathers were not involved. In two cases, up-to-date case plans had not been developed. Reviewers noted that some case plans were dated to be effective for one year. However, statute requires that out-of-home placement plans be reviewed and updated every six months, and in-home child protective service plans be reviewed and updated every three months.

Stakeholder Interviews: There were varied observations regarding agency practices to engage parents and age-appropriate children in case planning activities. Some stakeholders observed that appropriate family members were consistently engaged in the case planning process and have had the opportunity to provide input into needs, services and service providers. Multiple stakeholders described case plans as “cookie cutter” and observed that clients are not engaged in the planning process. These stakeholders encouraged county staff to more fully involve parents, children and relevant professionals in the case planning process.

Stakeholders also observed that case plans are consistently filed with the court and become a part of the court record. Foster parents commented that they also receive copies of case plans and their input is included in case plans. Foster parents also receive notice of court hearings and have been asked to provide input during hearings.

County Self Assessment: Workers meet with families to determine goals, strengths, and areas in need of improvement. Workers/supervisors/peers staff cases on a regular basis to gain input as to direction and planning. BCHS utilizes Family Group Decision Making in an attempt to involve the family in the decision-making process. The agency also holds regular administrative reviews for all placements which involve all parties, including custodial and non-custodial parents. All cases have plans.

While efforts are made to develop independent living plans, BCHS does not currently fully meet this requirement. Social workers try, but do not always do, a thorough job in this category. Barriers to completion of ILS plans include lack of available services, children living in remote locations, children and families unwilling to participate, and staff time.

Summary: Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. There was some inconsistency across data sources. While the county self assessment described clear expectations for family involvement in the development of case plans, inconsistent practices were noted through the case review. In addition, some stakeholders noted inconsistent practice in this area as well.

Item 19. Worker visits with child

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 19 was applicable in all 12 cases reviewed. The item referred to the typical patterns of face-to-face contact between the caseworkers and the children; if the frequency of visits was consistent with the needs of the children; and whether visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery and goal attainment. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the contact was sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the children’s safety and well-being. The results of the assessment were as follows:

- Item 19 was rated a Strength in three of four in-home and six of eight placement cases, or 75 percent of applicable cases.
- Item 19 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in three applicable cases (25 percent).

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency of the worker’s visits with children were sufficient to meet the children’s needs and ensure adequate monitoring of their safety and well-being. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the frequency of contact between workers and children was insufficient to meet children’s needs and ensure safety and well-being.

The assessment of Item 19 also identified the following:

	Number of Cases:			
	Weekly	Bi-weekly	Monthly	Less than Monthly
The most typical pattern of visitation between the caseworker and the children during the period under review:	0	4	6	2

	Yes	No
The frequency of visits was consistent with the needs of the children:	9	3
The visits between caseworkers and children focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery and goal attainment:	12	0

Summary of Case Review Findings: Face-to-face visits between caseworkers and children occurred bi-weekly to monthly in the majority of cases reviewed. When more contact was necessary to meet children’s needs, workers increased the frequency of their contacts. Some of the contacts occurred while caseworkers were transporting children for visits or appointments or supervising visits. Reviewers noted caseworkers spending individual time with children in various settings. In all of the cases reviewed, caseworkers’ contacts with children were focused on pertinent issues.

In all three cases rated an Area Needing Improvement, the frequency of face-to-face visits (less than monthly in two cases) was not consistent with the needs of the children. In one in-home case, contacts between the caseworker and some of the children in the family were sporadic, and contacts did not occur with other children in the family. Two placement cases in which the children’s goals were reunification were noted as needing improvement. In one of those cases, visits averaged bi-monthly; in the other case, visits occurred less than monthly, and a number of the contacts occurred at court hearings.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders provided limited input on this item. Those who did provide comment indicated that caseworkers were knowledgeable about the needs of children and the families with whom they work.

County Self Assessment: Social workers typically carry 10-14 cases. Caseloads are in accordance with best practices standards. Seventy-three percent of children and families have had face-to-face contact with a worker in the last two months. If a case is open, it is expected that the client will be seen on a regular basis. Limited time and staff constraints do play a role in this; expected budget cuts will not allow this high level of contact to continue.

Summary: Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Information across data sources was generally consistent. Agency caseworkers made concerted efforts to have face-to-face contact with children at a frequency that was consistent with their needs. The county identified barriers to maintaining this level of contact in the self assessment, specifically staff and time constraints, as well as anticipated budget cuts.

Item 20. Worker visits with parents

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement _____ Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 20 was applicable in 11 of 12 cases reviewed. Worker visits with parents referred to the typical patterns of face-to-face contact between the caseworkers and the parents; whether the frequency of visits was consistent with the needs of the children; and if visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery and goal attainment. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the caseworker had sufficient

face-to-face contact with both parents to attain the permanency goal and ensure the children’s safety and well-being. The results of the assessment were as follows:

- Item 20 was rated a Strength in two of four in-home and five of seven placement cases, or 63.6 percent of applicable cases.
- Item 20 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in four applicable cases (36.4 percent).
- Item 20 was Not Applicable in one case.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item when reviewers determined that visits with parents were sufficient to address the parents’ needs and that visits focused on issues pertaining to case planning, service delivery and goal attainment. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the frequency of contact between the worker and parents was insufficient to ensure the children’s safety and well-being, or to track the progress of the case toward the permanency goal. Cases were Not Applicable when visiting with parents was contrary to the safety or best interests of the children.

The assessment of Item 20 also identified the following:

The most typical pattern of visitation between the caseworker and parents was:

	Number of Cases:				
	Weekly	Bi-weekly	Monthly	Less than monthly	NA
Mothers:	2	4	3	2	1
Fathers:	0	1	0	4	7

		Number of Cases:		
		Yes	No	NA
The frequency of visits was consistent with the needs of the children:	Mothers:	9	2	1
	Fathers:	2	3	7
The visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery and goal attainment:	Mothers:	11	0	1
	Fathers:	2	2	8

Summary of Case Review Findings: Overall, caseworker face-to-face visits occurred more frequently and consistently with mothers than with fathers. There were examples of the frequency of visits appropriately increasing or decreasing as the needs of the family changed. In some cases where visits weren’t occurring as frequently as desired, the agency continued to make efforts to contact parents, particularly mothers. In all cases, visits with mothers were focused on pertinent case issues.

In two cases (one in-home and one placement) the caseworker had no contact with the children’s fathers, and reviewers noted that the children spent significant amounts of time with their fathers. In one placement case, the child had a goal of reunification and there was a three month gap in face-to-face contact between the caseworker and the child’s mother.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholder comments included in Item 19 are relevant to this item as well.

County Self Assessment: The self assessment comments included in Item 19 were relevant to this item as well.

Summary: Item 20 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. As indicated in Item 19, agency caseworkers made concerted efforts to have face-to-face contact with parents at a frequency that was consistent with their needs. Additional efforts to maintain sufficient contact with fathers was indicated.

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 2

Well-being Outcome 2 evaluated whether an assessment of educational needs is made for the children, and the agency’s response to meeting those needs. In order to achieve substantial conformity on Well-being Outcome 2, the outcome must have been rated substantially achieved in 90 percent of the cases reviewed. With 85.7 percent of the cases reviewed rated as substantially achieved, Beltrami County did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-being Outcome 2.

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.		
Number of cases reviewed according to degree of outcome achievement:		
	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially achieved:	6	85.7%
Partially achieved:	0	0%
Not achieved or addressed:	1	14.3%
Not applicable:	5	--

Item 21. Educational needs of the child

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 21 was applicable in seven of 12 cases reviewed. This item focused on the agency’s efforts to assess and meet the educational needs of children in foster care, and for children receiving in-home services, when educational needs were relevant to the reason the agency was involved with the family. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether children’s educational needs were assessed and whether appropriate services were provided to meet those needs. The results of the assessment were as follows:

- Item 21 was rated a Strength in the one applicable in-home case and five of six placement cases, or 85.7 percent of applicable cases.
- Item 21 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in one applicable case (14.3 percent).
- Item 21 was Not Applicable in five cases.

Cases were rated a Strength when reviewers determined that the agency was actively involved in assessing children’s educational needs, advocating for services to meet educational needs and/or referring children for services to meet their needs. Cases were rated an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the agency had not made sufficient efforts to either assess educational needs or arrange for services to meet identified needs. Cases were Not

Applicable when children were too young to be enrolled in school, or for in-home services cases in which children did not have education related issues.

The assessment of Item 21 also identified the following:

- In one in-home case, it was determined that the educational needs of the children were relevant to the reason why the agency was involved with the family, and that it was a reasonable expectation that the agency address educational issues.
- In four of six applicable foster care cases, the children were enrolled in multiple schools as a result of being placed in foster care.

Children’s educational needs were being appropriately addressed in the following ways:

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
Special education classes:	1	1	10
Services for identified educational needs:	1	1	10
Early intervention for preschool children:	1	0	11
Inclusion of school records in the case file:	3	4	5
Advocacy with the education/school system:	3	1	8
Attention to education in case planning:	6	1	5
Providing education records to foster parents:	4	2	6

Summary of Case Review Findings: Overall, children received educational services consistent with their identified needs. There were several examples of educational assessments being conducted, and no educational needs being identified. In one in-home case, it was noted that educational needs had not been the reason for the agency’s initial involvement, but when educational issues were identified later, the caseworker advocated for the child and assisted in getting referrals made and appropriate services set up. In other cases it was noted that foster parents took the lead in assuring educational needs were being met by maintaining contact and advocating for children with the schools.

In the one case rated as needing improvement, the child had been through an extensive evaluation that resulted in, among other things, a recommendation for services to address Emotional/Behavior Disabilities (EBD). The child did not receive EBD services, nor were educational needs addressed in the child’s case plan.

Stakeholder Interviews: There were no stakeholder comments specific to this item. Educational personnel were not participants in any of the stakeholder interviews conducted.

County Self Assessment: Beltrami County Human Services works closely with the schools and collaborative systems to insure that all children are having their educational needs met.

Summary: Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Information on this item was limited to case reviews and the county self assessment. Data from those two sources was generally consistent. Overall, the educational needs of children were adequately assessed and identified needs were addressed through provision of services.

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 3

Well-being Outcome 3 evaluated whether an assessment of physical and mental health needs was made for children, and the agency’s response in meeting those needs. In order to achieve substantial conformity on Well-being Outcome 3, the outcome must have been rated as substantially achieved in 90 percent of the cases reviewed. With 41.7 percent of the cases reviewed rated as substantially achieved, Beltrami County did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-being Outcome 3.

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.		
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:		
	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially achieved:	5	41.7%
Partially achieved:	1	8.3%
Not achieved or addressed:	6	50%
Not applicable:	0	--

Item 22. Physical health of the child

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement _____ Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 22 was applicable in eight of 12 cases reviewed. This item focused on the agency’s efforts to assess and meet the physical and dental needs of children in foster care. It also applied to children receiving in-home services, when these needs were relevant to the reason the agency was involved with the family. It was also necessary to address physical/dental health issues when the circumstances of the family and the agency’s involvement warranted it. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether children’s physical health needs had been appropriately assessed, and the services designed to meet those needs had been, or were being, provided. Assessment of this item also considered the state guidelines for initial health screenings. The results of the assessment were as follows:

- Item 22 was rated a Strength in five of eight applicable placement cases (62.5 percent).
- Item 22 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in three applicable placement cases (37.5 percent).
- Item 22 was Not Applicable in all four in-home cases.

Cases were rated a Strength when reviewers determined that children’s health needs were routinely assessed and appropriate services were provided. Placement cases were rated as Area Needing Improvement when the child had not had medical or dental care, or when there was no documentation in the case record of medical or dental assessments, including the requirement for a physical exam within 30 days of entering foster care. Cases were rated an Area Needing Improvement for in-home cases when reviewers determined that the children had needs for health services that were not being addressed. Cases were Not Applicable when there were in-home services and there were no evident physical health issues.

The assessment of Item 22 also identified the following:

- Health needs of the children were not relevant to the reason why the agency was involved with the family in the in-home cases reviewed.
- In four of five applicable foster care cases, the children received an initial health screening upon his/her most recent entry into care, or the agency assured that a health examination was completed within 12 months prior to the children’s placement.
- In two of five applicable foster care cases, the initial health screening was not provided within 30 days of the child’s most recent entry into care.

Children’s physical health needs were being addressed in the following ways during the period under review:

	Number of Cases:			
	Significantly	Partially	Not at All	NA
Preventive health care:	5	3	0	4
Preventive dental care:	5	1	1	5
Immunizations:	6	0	2	4
Treatment for identified health needs:	4	0	0	8
Treatment for identified dental needs:	4	1	0	7
Providing health records to foster parents:	4	2	2	4

Summary of Case Review Findings: In most cases, medical and dental health needs of children were assessed and services were provided to meet those needs. There were fairly significant health needs in some of the cases reviewed. The agency worked diligently to address those needs and appropriate treatment services were well coordinated. Foster parents and facility staff were noted as being instrumental in assuring that children’s health needs were being met.

In two of the cases rated as needing improvement, children did not receive the required physical health examination within 30 days of the initial entry into care, nor was there evidence that the children had completed a physical health examination within 12 months prior to placement.¹ Some of the caseworkers were unaware of the requirement for a physical health examination upon a child’s entry into care. In another case, there were some fairly significant dental health needs that were not addressed until 11 months after they were identified. Overall, there was a lack of documentation in the case files regarding the health needs of children.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders commented that agency caseworkers and public health nursing services coordinate services and effectively communicate with one another to meet the physical health needs of children. Coordination occurs particularly in cases involving methamphetamines. The growing number of babies born to mothers abusing chemicals, and the resources needed to meet the needs of those families was a concern for stakeholders. They also indicated that agency caseworkers review the medical needs of children with foster parents, and jointly determined who would take the lead in assuring that those needs were being met.

¹ Minnesota Rule 9560.0600 outlines the requirements for meeting the physical and dental health needs of children, including the requirement for a physical health examination upon a child’s initial entry into out-of-home care.

County Self Assessment: Beltrami County works closely with foster parents, relatives who have children in their care, public health professionals and others to ensure that the health care needs of children are being met.

Summary: Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Stakeholders and the county self assessment indicated consistent practices in meeting the health needs of children. There were some inconsistencies noted in practice through the case review including caseworker knowledge of requirements for physical health examinations upon a child’s entry into out-of-home care.

Item 23. Mental health of the child

_____ Strength Area Needing Improvement _____ Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 23 was applicable in all 12 cases reviewed. This item focused on the agency’s efforts to assess and meet the mental health needs of children in foster care. It applied to children receiving in-home services when mental health needs were relevant to the reason the agency was involved with the family, and the need to address mental health issues was a reasonable expectation. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether children’s mental health needs had been appropriately assessed, and the services designed to meet those needs had been, or were being, provided. The results of the assessment were as follows:

- Item 23 was rated a Strength in six of eight applicable placement cases (50 percent).
- Item 23 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in four in-home and two placement, or 50 percent of applicable cases.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength when reviewers determined that mental health needs had been significantly assessed and the identified needs for services were significantly met. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that assessments and services were provided only partially or not at all. Cases were Not Applicable in placement cases when there was no requirement for a children’s mental health screening or the children’s parents refused the screening and there were no indications of need for mental health services.

The assessment of Item 23 also identified the following:

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
A Children’s Mental Health Screening Tool was completed:	3	4	5
The screening tool was completed within recommended timeframes:	2	4	6

The agency addressed the mental health needs of children in the following manner:

	Significantly	Partially	Not at All	NA
Formal diagnostic assessment:	6	1	2	3
Ongoing treatment for identified needs:	5	1	2	4

Summary of Case Review Findings: Mental health assessment and service delivery was stronger in the child placement cases than for in-home cases. Various examples of mental health

evaluations were noted, ranging from outpatient diagnostic assessments to inpatient 30-day evaluations. In addition, children were involved in various mental health services to address identified needs, including counseling services and medication monitoring.

In five of the six cases rated as needing improvement (four of which were in-home cases), children's mental health screenings had not been completed as required by statute.² Reviewers noted that it was difficult to discern through interviews and documentation whether there were any mental health needs. In the other case, a children's mental health screening had been completed, and there was an indication of a need for further evaluation that did not occur. In addition, in one of the cases, a foster parent had requested services for a child to address grief and separation issues and those requests had not been followed up on, nor had services been provided.

Stakeholder Interviews: Overall, stakeholders identified that mental health assessment services were available in the community, but that gaps do exist, including a need for additional child psychiatry services and emergency mental health services. In addition, stakeholders indicated a need for greater coordination between county child welfare staff and contracted children's mental health caseworkers.

County Self Assessment: Beltrami County has a full array of mental health services available that are provided through the Children's Mental Health Collaborative. Psychiatric services, therapeutic foster care settings, mental health case managers, psychologists and others all ensure that the mental health needs of children are being met. Services include screening, case management, day treatment, Children's Therapeutic Services and Support (CTSS), and other in-home and school-based services. In addition, Beltrami County provides children with mental health services in the least restrictive settings possible. They are working towards improving this system through coordination with the corrections system, more effective and accessible services to parents with children who may have emotional disabilities, and coordination with the primary care medical system.

BCHS utilizes a Rule 5 committee which consists of agency staff, mental health professionals, and others regarding the possible placement of children with mental health concerns.

Summary: Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Information across data sources was inconsistent. While the county self assessment described a full array of mental health services available to meet the needs of children, stakeholders identified a number of gaps in available services. In addition, case reviews reflected inconsistent practices in assessing mental health needs.

² Minnesota Statutes 245.4874 (14) outline the requirements for conducting children's mental health screenings.

SYSTEMIC FACTORS

The self assessment of the county's child welfare infrastructure provided descriptions and ratings, of strength or area needing improvement, on eight systemic factors. The Minnesota Child and Family Service Review further examined these factors through stakeholder interviews and the on-site case review. Many systemic issues were previously identified and addressed as they applied to specific performance items. Observations listed here summarize some of the key findings on these systemic factors.

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

Case Review System: Beltrami County has an active Children's Justice Initiative (CJI) team which includes well-rounded representation from the community. The lead CJI team judge provides strong leadership for the team. Team members described changes that have been made through the CJI team that have positively impacted the system, including changes in the court schedule, use of scheduling orders, and members becoming more familiar with the roles and responsibilities of other team members. The recently-held regional CJI conference was identified as being helpful in providing additional focus for the team.

The county also has a well-established administrative review process that effectively allows for the review of foster care cases every six months. The administrative review was identified by stakeholders as an opportunity for families and professionals to maintain ongoing involvement in child placement cases.

Agency Responsiveness to the Community: The agency has a commitment to building effective working relationships with its community partners through inter-agency cooperation and multi-agency collaboration. This includes an active and effective Child Protection Team, a county-wide Family Services Collaborative, a Children's Mental Health Collaborative and the CJI team.

Overall, the agency has developed a collaborative working relationship with Leech Lake Tribal Social Services that contributes to meeting the needs of children and families in the county. A representative from Leech Lake consistently participates on the Child Protection Team and the CJI team. Stakeholders viewed this as contributing to improved outcomes for children and families.

Beltrami County Human Services has, for a number of years, had a caseworker officed at Red Lake Tribal Social Services to work on meeting the needs of tribal members. The current staff person has been in that position for nine years. In addition, the agency has participated in joint Title IV-E training with Red Lake staff which has helped to improve communication between the agencies.

Supervisor and Social Work Resources: The county self assessment identified that social workers typically carry 10-14 cases, which is in accordance with best practice standards. In addition, staff turnover is very low. There was consensus among stakeholders that the work that county child welfare staff does with children and families is extremely difficult and, at times, emotionally taxing. These stakeholders recognized how important the work is and appreciated the county social workers' dedication to their clients.

The following systemic factor(s) should be addressed in the development of the Beltrami County Program Improvement Plan:

Agency Responsiveness to the Community: While the agency has made effective efforts toward developing positive working relationships with its tribal partners, additional and continued efforts are indicated. The Leech Lake Tribal Social Services representative identified specific areas in which they would like to see additional collaboration and consultation, including their participation in child protection assessments and investigations, and consistently scheduled joint staff meetings for purposes of case consultation.

The relationship with Red Lake Family and Children's Services is not as fully developed. The Red Lake staff expressed an interest in striving for a more collaborative working relationship with the county agency. Recent efforts made by the social services supervisor were appreciated, including participation in Red Lake staff meetings and consultations with the director. Continued efforts from county administration and front-line staff to establish ongoing dialogue would be beneficial to all parties.

Information System: While some expectations regarding the use of the Social Service Information System (SSIS) are clearly identified, day-to-day use is inconsistent and varies among workers. Documentation in case files was identified as an issue throughout the case review process. Agency administration indicated that a priority for them was to implement full use of the intake capabilities of SSIS.

Supervisor and Social Work Resources: The social services supervisor at the time the review was conducted has since left the agency. The agency is, for the second time in one year, seeking to fill this position. According to the self assessment, the supervisor to worker ratio is 25 to 1. The agency also has a lead social worker position that can aid in alleviating some of the workload for the supervisor. However, the role of the lead social worker is unclear. The agency should further define the roles and responsibilities of the lead social worker position and communicate those responsibilities to all staff.

Quality Assurance: The county self assessment described several agency quality assurance practices which included weekly contacts between the supervisor and staff members for case consultation, the existence of an intake screening team to screen incoming child protection reports, and various other committees for reviewing the appropriateness of placement decisions and services provided.

It is recommended that agency administration reassess their quality assurance needs, and identify effective quality assurance practices that will promote more consistent practice and improved outcomes for children and families. The agency would benefit from the implementation of a formal qualitative case review system using a standardized process and tool which incorporates individual, scheduled consultation time with caseworkers. The Program Improvement Plan provides an opportunity for strategic planning and for the county to identify specific areas of focus. An internal case review system will provide a means of monitoring progress in those areas.



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