

State Level Citizens Review Board

DFCS Five-Year Plan Review and Recommendations

June 14, 2002

Introduction

The following represents the best effort of the State Level Citizens Review Board to comment on the progress of DFCS in executing its five-year plan over the last 12-month period, based on reports submitted the Board by DFCS staff members.

It must be stated emphatically at the outset, however, that the Board is gravely concerned about the current and immediate future capacity of DFCS to execute its basic mission, let alone progress. Both internal and media reports indicate that a crisis of immense scope threatens to engulf the agency. Severe funding and staffing shortages will undo and indeed rapidly reverse whatever gains have been achieved. Worse, damage to vulnerable children and families is predictable and unavoidable. The Board therefore calls upon the state's political leadership to address without delay the financial, managerial and political obstacles to resolving the current crisis.

This overarching concern stated, three key assumptions shape this report and its closing recommendations:

1. First, the Board's perspective is that of the concerned citizen, and not that of expert critic. The Board wishes to neither challenge the professional expertise of DFCS as it goes about its work nor question the accuracy of the data used in its reporting on plan implementation.

2. Second, the Board's proper focus is on the outcomes specified in the plan, rather than the plethora of activities identified by the Division as important to achieving outcomes. Activity *per se* is of little value unless it contributes to a desired result.

3. Third, the most important outcomes are client outcomes. Client outcomes constitute the leading edge of the plan, according to the plan's logical structure, and therefore bear the greatest evaluative weight. System outcomes should be evaluated as well, but their value derives primarily from their contribution to client benefit.

Our format here follows the structure of the plan itself, as we review each major component, Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being, in turn. In each section we state each client outcome and comment on its achievement, followed by a brief comment on each of

the related system outcomes. Client outcomes and Board comments are boxed for easy identification by the reader.

SAFETY

Client Outcome 1:

Related System Outcomes:

Reduce the number of subsequent substantiated reports for children known to the agency. C Family Preservation Services provided statewide (1.1 & 1.2).

Comment: Progress appears to be good. The number of Homemakers is presently at 99 and Family Preservation Specialists currently number 76 in 66 counties.

C Provide statewide network of community based services (1.3).

Comment: There are presently 60 county task forces forming the Mississippi Permanency Partnership Network. While this figure represents substantial progress, reports indicate that 6 of 9 Regional Coordinator positions are in jeopardy due to the unavailability of state funds needed to provide match for federal grants. Without continuous coordinators in place, it is expected that the MPPN would unravel.

C Improved access to legal assistance for families and children (1.4).

Comment: Progress appears to be poor. Reports indicate that no further progress has been occurred in establishing a structure allowing the desired access.

C A model for Individualized Service Planning Team that can be replicated statewide (1.5a). A model for strengths-based assessment and needs-based service delivery (including the flexible expenditure of funds demonstrating cost effective service delivery) (1.5b).

Comment: Progress has apparently occurred but has been limited, primarily due to funding and staff shortages. The IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project was implemented from April, 2001 through March, 2002 in Rankin and Jones counties only. Numerous evaluation activities have been ongoing, including site visits and data collection on cases assigned to experimental and control groups. The Project was to be implemented in Holmes and Lamar Counties beginning April, 2002, with a phased implementation in six additional counties after April. Reports indicate both delays and modifications to the program of services necessitated by funding and staffing shortages in the target counties.

C A community-based family support services network statewide (1.6).

Comment: Solid progress is evident. The number of Family Resource Centers was deliberately reduced from 67 to 38 in 2001 in order to eliminate duplication of services and provide for better assessment by the Prevention Unit. The current 38 FRC=s are located in all nine regions; in 2001 approximately 25,000 parents are children were reported to have received one or more core services of parent education, parent support, information and referral, teen pregnancy prevention, afterschool activities, and life skills training.

A model for Social Group Work Practice that can be replicated statewide (1.7).

Comment: A model developed in Region I-E has been used for statewide training and is intended for adoption as best practice. However, reports indicate that staffing shortages have provided a significant challenge to full implementation of these practices. Moreover, while subjective impressions of the model are favorable, no formal evaluation of the model's effectiveness has been attempted. Remarks by the Division Director indicate that the statistical indicators seem to very effectiveness of the model, but lack of staff resources has compromised our practice. (emphasis added) Regional Director reports suggest that time-consuming MACWIS implementation has delayed implementation of best practices.

A continuous current inventory of services and accurate assessments of community needs for service delivery for families and children and expansion of needed services (1.8).

Comment: Some progress is apparently being made through the annual conduct of needs assessments at the county network level. The Protection Unit report indicates that a new data collection instrument was field tested in November, 2001, with plans to use it statewide to provide more in-depth information than the more general assessments currently done.

Expanded training capacity (1.9).

Comment: The plan called for implementation of a Child Welfare Training Institute to achieve this outcome. Funding problems and a falling IV-E eligibility rate has compromised progress, however. Recent undocumented reports indicate that the state legislature provided \$250,000 to Jackson State University to initiate pre-service child welfare worker preparation through the Consortium of Schools of Social Work.

Model for implementation of Quality Assurance Program statewide (1.10).

Comment: The pilot project in Region I-E has made some headway, organizing committees and conferences. The report indicates, however, that loss of staff PINS and inability to fill vacant positions have severely limited implementation.

Client Outcome 2:

Reduce the number of substantiated abuse and neglect cases of children placed in homes licensed by the agency.

Related System Outcomes:

New standards for child placing and residential facilities (2.1).

Comment: New standards are reported to be in the final stages of approval.

Providers will be aware of new standards and requirements (2.2).

Comment: This outcome will presumably be addressed following the approval of new standards.

Adequate staff to monitor licensing standards (2.3).

Comment: Funding and staff shortages are hampering the Licensure Unit ability to make progress toward this outcome. Currently the Unit reports four vacant positions.

Expand family support services available for families (2.4).

Comment: Progress here appears mixed at best. The Licensure Unit reports active parent support groups with approximately 175 members. On the other hand, some groups previously developed have become inactive. Services are apparently tapped through a variety of resource networks, including Project Homestead, but no numbers or inventory of services are provided.

Increased number and type of foster care homes available (2.5).

Comment: Progress appears to be quite limited, and no numbers are provided that would allow objective assessment. Reporting focuses on training for foster parents, which comes from a variety of diffuse sources. The Licensure Unit has not been able to secure a trainer/recruiter as planned. Licensure and Adoption staff are conducting joint recruitment and training in some areas.

Foster care competencies established for workers, supervisors and foster parents (2.6).

Comment: No information was provided to the Board regarding this outcome.

Improved collaboration and teamwork (2.7).

Comment: No information was provided to the Board regarding this outcome.

Better coordination among state agencies and service providers to ensure more appropriate placements (2.8).

Comment: Progress here is unclear. Two Placement staff are members of a state level review team, but no statement is made in the report as to how placements are affected by this involvement. An updated report indicates that progress has been made in community placements through wrap-around services, but also that large service gaps persist.

Annual report based on system review to utilize data to support the need for Levels of Care, Targeted Case Management and other placement needs (2.9).

Comment: The formulation of this outcome is unclear. Is emphasis on the production of an annual report, or on use of data to support Levels of Care, etc.? The report by the Placement Unit indicates, it would appear, that the Citizens Review Board is the State Level Review Team. If so, it should be pointed out that the Board does not conduct system review in such a way that would support Levels of Care, Targeted Case Management and other placement needs.

Timely response to request for Administrative Hearings. More adequate assessment of substantiation criteria (2.10).

Comment: This system outcome appears to be in severe trouble. While 102 hearings were conducted between January 1 and June 30, 2001, only 1 hearing took place since June 30, as the contract for the Administrative Hearing Officer was denied by the Deputy Administrator's Office. Has the Division abandoned its commitment to achieving this outcome?

Client Outcome 3:

Related System Outcomes:

Reduce the number of re-entries into agency custody due to abuse/neglect.

A model for statewide implementation of safety, risk and family assessment

(3.1). Comment:

The baseline figure here is 72 re-entries for FY 1998. The number of re-entries reported for the first nine months of calendar year 2001 is 1103. Extrapolation would bring the full year figure to 1111. An assessment model has been used in Region 4-E and evaluated by the Regional Director. The report indicates a need for additional training on assessment. A schedule for statewide implementation, if one exists, is not evident.

Increased staff skills in Family Preservation (3.2).

Comment: Training is taking place, with, it is hoped, the desired increase in worker skills.

Expanded support services available to families (3.3).

Comment: Progress in this area is stymied by the agency funding crisis. The Prevention Unit report indicates that plans for twenty adoption specialist positions have been placed on hold due to significant budget shortfalls. Lack of funds has also stopped development of regional funding that would permit service provision to client families.

Expanded services delivered through Community Partnerships (3.4).

Comment: The Prevention Unit reports a recasting of the Mississippi Permanency Planning Network to include county networks, family resource centers, and indeed all subgrantees and contractors managed by the Unit. While no clear evidence is presented to indicate expanded services through this revision, expanded and more integrated services are expected.

Client Outcome 4:

Related System Outcomes:

Reduce the number of children entering State custody.

Expanded Family Preservation services statewide (4.1).

Comment:

The baseline figure here is 1121 children entering custody in FY 1998. The number reported for the first nine months of calendar year 2001 is 1103. Extrapolation would bring the full year figure to

Comment: Progress appears to be good. The number of Homemakers and Family Preservation Specialists, and the number of counties in which they operate, has continued to expand.

Family Support services will be available in each region (4.2).

Comment: Progress is evident. The number of Family Resource Centers was deliberately reduced from 67 to 38 in 2001 in order to eliminate duplication of services and provide for better assessment by the Prevention Unit. The current 38 FRCs are located in all nine regions; in 2001 approximately 25,000 parents and children were reported to have received one or more core services of parent education, parent support, information and referral, teen pregnancy prevention, afterschool activities, and life skills training.

Timely response to client needs at local level (4.3).

Comment: No data in current reports address this system outcome.

Improved response to child abuse/neglect reports from the community (4.5).

Comment: The Protection Unit reports only that staffing is being maintained. Even if this is so (skepticism may be permitted in the current climate of staffing collapse), no data is presented to justify a judgment of improved response.

Client Outcome 5:

Related System Outcomes:
Increase the number of children who are safely reunited with family members.

Comment: Intensified reunification services (5.2).

The baseline figure here is 51% (776 out of 1514) of children leaving MDHS custody to be reunited with family members. The Prevention Unit report references safety outcome 3.3., about which is indicated that plans for twenty adoption specialist positions have been placed on hold due to significant budget shortfalls. Lack of funds has also stopped development of regional funding that would permit enhanced service provision to client families.

Increased home-based services (5.3).

Comment: 99 Homemakers and 76 Family Preservation workers operate in 66 counties, carrying out the bulk of their activities through in-home contact. It would appear, then, that progress toward this outcome is steady. The precise extent of the increase in services is not, however, evident.

Intensified reunification services available to families and foster children (5.5).

Comment: No information is available to the Board. The report by the Licensure Unit indicates only that the Training Unit will take the lead.

Client Outcome 6:

Related System Outcomes:
Reduce the average number of child fatalities due to maltreatment for children previously known to the agency over the next five years.

Comment:

The baseline figure here is a 10.75 annual average of child fatalities due to maltreatment

Expanded Family Preservation services to at-risk families (6.2).

Comment: Progress appears to be good. The Prevention Unit references the expansion in positions and counties covered by services.

Statewide Child Fatality Review process (6.6).

Comment: Reporting indicates that a state level review process is being maintained. It is unclear to Board, however, just what the child fatality review process looks like.

Annual report based on system review (6.7).

Comment: It is not evident that an annual report has ever been produced. Reporting references only a regional training conference slated for May, 2002, to which members of the Child Fatality Review Team are invited.

Development of local team for the review of child fatalities (6.8).

Comment: The plan connects the outcome with training for the review team. Reporting by the Protection Unit references only the above-noted regional conference in May, 2002.

Statewide system for Multi-Disciplinary Child Abuse Review (6.9).

Comment: Progress appears good. Reporting by the Prevention Unit indicates 42 counties and all but one Circuit Court Districts participating in the Multi-Disciplinary Child Abuse Review Team, with plans to expand to 50 counties and all court districts in 2002.

Development of local teams for disciplinary child abuse case review (6.10).

Comment: Progress here appears to be solid. The plan connects this outcome to training of the Multi-Disciplinary Teams. In 2001, five sessions of specialized training, with emphasis on forensic interviewing, was provided to 34 law enforcement personnel and MDHS social workers. In October, 2001 a week-long Equal Justice Conference training MDT members on the multi-disciplinary approach to child abuse case handling.

Annual report based on system review (6.11).

Comment: The outcome is connected to training and support for the Children's Justice Act Task Force in its role of reporting to the Citizens Review Board. A fairly new Task Force is in place, and has been, according to reports by the Prevention Unit, oriented and trained. Apparently no report on the state's child abuse case handling system has been produced however; certainly no report has been made to the Citizens Review Board.

PERMANENCY

Client Outcome 1:

Related System Outcomes:

Decrease the average number of placement moves per child in foster care.

Comment:

Expanded Family Centered Practice (1.2).
The baseline figure for this outcome is the FY 1998 average of 2.29 moves per child. Data for the first nine months of FY 2003 indicate that all developments here are negative. In the face of existing shortages, forty-nine new positions were left out of the approved budget for next fiscal year (2003), as were eight current positions. In addition 96 positions are set to be abolished, on top of a vacancy rate of 39% (246 vacancies), due to a 10% cut in the agency's appropriation. Rather than expanding, social work practice of all types is contracting rapidly and dangerously.

C Increased number and type of placement options for children (1.4).

Comment: The Licensure Unit reports that the number of specialized homes for teen parents and emergencies has increased. No specific numbers are provided, however, so assessment of progress is impossible.

C Improved child welfare practice (1.5).

Comment: The outcome is vaguely (globally) stated, to say the least. The activity identified as contributing to this outcome is training new social workers on Family Centered Practice. Reports indicate that all new workers and family preservation staff are being trained. Not reported, however, is the number of workers trained. Nor is it evident just how this training is to produce the desired outcome.

C Increased Family Support services statewide (1.6).

Comment: Some progress appears evident. The Adoption Unit reports ongoing regional support groups, two Anew support groups initiated in the Central District, and a RFP for post-adoption services in the Southern District.

C Timely response to families= needs at local level (1.7).

Comment: No information was provided the Board regarding this outcome.

Client Outcome 2:

Related System Outcomes:

Reduce the average length of time in agency custody for children in foster care.

C Local resources available (2.1).

Comment: Mississippi Permanency Partnership Network county task forces, focusing on the strengthening of local resources, now exist in 60 counties, with growth and stabilization of Regions II & III attributed to the continuous presence of Regional Coordinators.

C Increased hiring of social work staff for Division of Family and Children= Services (2.3).

Comment: Based on the information provided it appears that no progress has

been made here. Reports suggest that the DFCS had high hopes for the Child Welfare Training Institute to produce new social workers through Title IV-E pre-service training grants. Funding to initiate the Institute was not provided, however.

C Statewide Concurrent Permanency Planning Practice (2.4).

Comment: Reports indicate that this outcome is being achieved.

C Improved understanding of permanency by courts (2.6).

Comment: Apparently no progress has been made toward this outcome. Here again the Division was looking to the Child Welfare Training Institute for outcome achievement, but the CWTI was not funded.

C Timely response to family needs at local level (2.7).

Comment: The Prevention Unit reports that the budget crisis has scuttled a plan to implement flexible funding need to address this outcome.

Client Outcome 3:

Related System Outcomes:

Reduce the number of children in agency custody being placed in group homes, residential facilities, institutional settings and out-of-state care.
C An available pool of qualified licensed family foster homes available statewide (3.2).

Comment:

Comment: A report on activities by the Licensure Unit indicates that some joint training is taking place, e.g. 18 adoption and licensure staff attended training together. A new training curriculum has been purchased, but no information on the conduct of actual trainings using the curriculum is provided. The relationship of these efforts to the outcome is not evident.

C Increased accountability for contract providers to ensure appropriate placement of all children in custody (3.3).

Comment: The Placement Unit indicates revised contract language to improve accountability of providers. However, no funds have been appropriated to develop the planned Levels of Care system envisioned by the plan. It is unclear that the placement of children has improved.

C Increased local resources (3.4).

Comment: The report by the Prevention Unit emphasizes the initiation of the Community Services Inventory project in June, 2001, and the potential it holds for encouraging the assessment and development of local resources. No information is provided regarding actual resource development, however.

C Improved coordination and shared responsibilities among state agencies for children in state custody (3.5).

Comment: The Division Director's report indicates that HB 1275 established an Interagency Coordinating Council for Children and Youth responsible for collecting and

analyzing data for purposes of system improvement. In addition, discussions were initiated with the Department of Mental Health toward establishing a system of care for seriously emotionally disturbed children.

Client Outcome 4:

Related System Outcomes:

C Increased pool of approved adoptive families (4.1).

Comment: The Adoption Unit reports an increase of 5%, possibly the result of new recruitment efforts.

C Increased number of attorneys available through the Attorney General's Office (4.2).

Comment: The Division Director reports that no progress toward this outcome has been made due to budget constraints.

C Improved TPR case preparation (4.3).

Comment: No progress is evident toward this outcome. Reports indicate that Placement Unit staff continue to assess the TPR process. One Regional Director reports that the TPR process appears to be about the same as permanency planning, which is discussed at staff meetings. Another RD reports that understaffed offices do not have time to complete TPR requirements. The Placement Unit also indicates that staffing shortages are responsible for TPR process delays.

C Adequately staffed Adoption Program (4.4).

Comment: No progress can be determined from the information provided.

C More stable adoptions (4.5).

Comment: No progress can be determined from the information provided.

C Increased adoptions (4.6).

Comment: Adoptions increased 10%, from 211 in 2000 to 232 in 2001.

C More timely adoptions for foster children in the system (4.7).

Comment: Data to assess progress are not provided. One report indicates that now there is less time to complete foster home adoptions, presumably due to crushing work loads. The Adoption Unit suggests that 75% of children featured on television have been either adopted or placed in adoptive homes, but numbers that could be used to measure timeliness are not provided.

C Reduce adoption disruptions (4.8).

Comment: Reports suggest no progress in 2001, but apparent progress in 2002. Additional data is required.

C Trained staff (4.9).

Comment: The Adoption Unit reports that 12 training sessions were held for 25 unit staff members.

C Accessible therapeutic services for adoptive families and children (4.10).

Comment: The Prevention Unit developed an RFP to establish a Post-Adoptions Services program in Regions VI-N and VI-S. Southern Christian Services was selected as the sub-grantee to develop the program. Apparently, no services are currently available, however.

C Improved access to legal assistance for adoptive families and children (4.11).

Comment: The Adoption Unit indicates that legal assistance is *not* available.

WELL-BEING

Client Outcome 1:

Related System Outcomes:
Increase the number of cases in which families demonstrate an increased capacity to meet their child/children's needs, preventing the assessment process from entering custody and allowing the child/children in custody to be returned to the family (1.1).

- Comment:
- b. State-of-the-art training for MDHS staff.
- c. Improved supervision statewide.

Comment: The Prevention Unit reports that work on the assessment process itself is ongoing, without providing detail of progress. A good deal of detail is provided on training of MDHS staff, however, and progress here appears to be real, if limited and uneven. Training has touched on implementation of the automated child welfare information system, on new worker and family preservation worker preparation, including the completion of assessments. Problems are evident, however. The report notes that training was suspended in February, 2002 due to budgetary constraints. Similar constraints derailed the effort to create a much-needed Child Welfare Training Institute.

The Division Director reports that 27 supervisory positions were created in 2001 with TANF funds, thereby significantly improving supervision ratios. At the same time it appears that supervisory training designed by the Training Unit was cancelled by the executive administration, presumably due to funding shortfalls.

The evident key to progress in this area is adequate staffing. Sadly, the Division Director reports that efforts with the legislature failed to secure funding needed. In fact, cuts in funding will not permit the agency to respond to a 39% vacancy rate. A Senate hearing on April 23 underscored staffing crisis conditions, most notably in Harrison County, where 16 of 22 social worker positions are currently unfilled. As stated succinctly in the Division Director's report: this shortfall severely compromises our ability to ensure the protection of children in this state (C)hildren are most assuredly at risk. The state consequently faces a mounting legal exposure risk.

Perhaps most disturbing is the implication of the Division Director's remarks that the greatest stumbling blocks may be within the Department itself. Division staff efforts to respond proactively to the financial crisis have gone unaided, indeed ignored, by the executive administration. We have support from everyone outside the agency, [including] our federal partners, but cannot receive support or assistance from the MDHS Division of Budgets and Accounting. (emphasis added)

In a similar vein, the Division Director reports that legislation to cap social worker caseloads was proposed by the Division to the Executive Director, but was not supported.

C Statewide family and children's services inclusive of Social Group Work Practice (1.2).

Comment: Reporting by the Protection Unit indicates only that group work

practice is ongoing, implying but not demonstrating outcome achievement. The Prevention Unit references the operation of the MPPN in 65 counties, but does not make an explicit connection to the system outcome.

C Statewide automated child welfare system (1.4).

Comment: No information has been provided to the Board regarding this outcome.

Client Outcome 2:

Related System Outcomes:

Children in custody have their educational, medical, dental and psychological needs met. C Providers and care givers (foster parents, parents, grandparents or relatives) will be better equipped to administer appropriate care for children (2.1).

Comment: The Placement Unit reports that MACWIS assessments are now available, but the extent the system is being used is unclear, as is the extent to which information is available to providers and caregivers. Moreover, numerous problems are cited in reports B the funding and staffing crisis has delayed the implementation of Targeted Case Management; lack of travel money has scuttled ASWS training. Hence, while progress toward this outcome is unclear, it surely is falling short of intentions.

C Each child in custody will have complete medical history (2.2).

Comment: Progress cannot be assessed on the basis of the information provided. Regional Director reports indicate hope that all children have histories, and that MACWIS will be able to generate reports of such information, but firm numbers of any type are not provided. The Region IV RD report indicates that staff vacancy rates allow 913s (medical histories) to be done in adoption cases only.

C Improved service provision on new cases of children in custody (2.3).

Comment: Progress cannot be assessed on the basis of the information provided. Regional Director reports state that Quality Assurance case review instruments are not being used.

C Enhanced service provision for children in care (2.4 & 2.5).

Comment: Progress cannot be assessed on the basis of the information provided. Regional Director reports generally indicate that reviews and hearings are taking place as scheduled, but documentation of improved service provision is not provided.

C Judges will conduct Permanency Hearings to assure appropriate review of cases in compliance with federal mandates (2.6).

Comment: Progress cannot be adequately assessed on the basis of the information provided. The Division Director reports multiple trainings of judges and referees. The Attorney General's office has provided sample court orders. Nonetheless, IV-E eligibility rates have fallen (currently at 41.1%) due to pockets of non-compliance with required permanency hearings and court orders. Efforts by the Eligibility and Training Units have been initiated, but specific progress is unknown.

C Enhanced Family Centered Practice (2.8).

Comment: Progress cannot be assessed on the basis of the information provided.

Client Outcome 3:

Related System Outcomes:

Increase the number of youth (age 14-21 yrs.) in custody who participate in the Independent Living Program to prepare for independent living.
Program; same for Native American children in the state (3.1).

Comment:

This system outcome is virtually identical to the client outcome. Progress related to training identified as contributing to this outcome remains unclear. The Licensure Unit reports that collaborative training with Native Americans has taken place and will continue; Training Unit members participated in a forum sponsored by the Choctaw in August, 2001. The Independent Living report further indicates an effort by a collection of Southeastern states to develop a competency-based training curriculum, ongoing conference activities, and implementation of a new APATH training curriculum for parents. The relationship of such training to achieving the numerical outcome is not evident.

Other activities listed in the plan appear to be on track to varying degrees, but the relationship of these activities to the outcome is unclear here as well.

C Development and/or coordination of community services through partnerships, including existing mentoring programs (3.2).

Comment: The Independent Living report indicates that IL specialists network with Regional Network Coordinators to assist with services. It is reasonable to infer that some local network providers, notably Family Resource Centers, are providing training in independent living. No systematic evidence is presented, however.

C Increased stability for youth graduating out of the system (3.4).

Comment: One report by a Regional Director indicates only that policy and practice is discussed at each regional staff meeting. The Independent Living report states that progress is being made in the way of policy development, data gathering, extended medical coverage, and aftercare of discharged youth. As yet there is no evidence of actual increased stability, however.

C Improved data collection system on youth graduating out of the system (3.5).

Comment: Several developments appear underway, including MACWIS reporting and a distinct Independent Living database.

C Increased support of Independent Living Program for youth (3.6).

Comment: Independent Living reports development of an aftercare packet for use by aftercare specialists, as well as statewide promotion of the IL program, conference activity, and a mentor-matching program for all graduating youth. No specifics, including number of youth involved, are provided in the report, however.

C More responsive Independent Living Program (3.9).

Comment: This outcome appears redundant of outcome 3.6

C Increased support for youth graduating out of the foster care system (3.10).
Comment: This outcome appears redundant of outcome 3.6

Summary and Recommendations

Summary

The DFCS plan has an overall excellent logical structure, with a set of specific client outcomes, related system outcomes, and activities intended to achieve outcomes. The focus of the Citizens Review Board has been on the assessment of progress toward outcome achievement, based on reports by DFCS staff. The Board has not attempted to evaluate the wealth of plan-related activity on the part of Division personnel.

Client Outcomes. Most important are the plan's client outcomes, which are formulated in a way that permits objective measurement based on data. Of thirteen (13) total client outcomes, it appears that to date seven (7) outcomes have been achieved as planned (with some qualifications), and four (4) have not been achieved. The Board was not able to assess achievement of the remaining two (2) outcomes, for a variety of reasons.

A summary of achievement is included in Appendix A, ADFCS Progress toward Planned Outcome Achievement. Qualifying comments are included within the report text itself.

System Outcomes. The plan does not formulate system outcomes in a way that permits a definitive assessment of achievement. Here the Board has attempted to make a reasonable assessment of progress toward the desired system change for a total of seventy-seven (77) system outcomes (a few of which are repeated) based on the information included in DFCS staff reports. Categories of progress are Good, Some, No, and Unclear.

In summary, there appears to be good progress toward seventeen (14) system outcomes, and at least some progress toward another eighteen (18) outcomes. On the other hand, there seems to be either no evident progress, or, worse, negative movement toward fourteen (14) outcomes, and in the case of fully thirty-one (31) outcomes, the Board was unable to assess progress based on the information provided.

Recommendations

Based on its assessment, the Citizens Review Board offers six major recommendations to DFCS in the continuing implementation of the Five-Year Plan.

1. First and foremost, resolve the current crisis in funding, staffing and leadership. By various accounts, the agency appears near a point of implosion. Unless and until the rapid decline in DFCS can be arrested, all bets are off regarding future plan progress. Indeed, it can be confidently predicted that the achievement of outcomes to date will be rapidly reversed.

2. Second, put priority focus on client outcome achievement. If the Board=s

assessment is correct, DFCS is definitely not meeting desired targets in four (31%) of its outcomes. In the case of two other outcomes (15%), either the formulation of the outcome or the data available make an evaluation impossible. In three cases (23%), outcome achievement is vitiated by important qualifications B in one case (substantiated abuse/neglect reports in licensed homes) the total number of cases is so small it is risky to draw a firm conclusion; in a second (average number of placement moves), while the outcome is, strictly speaking, achieved, in fact the average number of placement moves is fairly constant over time; in a third (youth participating in Independent Living preparation), the absolute number of youth participating has increased, while the percentage of *eligible* youth participating has in fact declined. Thus we may say that in nine (9) of thirteen (13) outcomes (69%), there is some problem of significance to be addressed.

DFCS is advised to reexamine and possibly reformulate the identified outcomes in light of experience to date. In those cases in which outcomes are clearly not being achieved, it is possible that baseline figures need to be reconsidered.

3. Third, continue to critique and rework the system outcomes. The current set outcomes is significantly improved over the prior year's tangle of over 100 outcomes. The current list might be further pruned and reduced in number, however. Overly broad outcomes (notably, improved child welfare practice, enhanced service provision for children in care) should be eliminated. Each outcome should be reassessed as to whether it is in fact an activity (a means to an end, rather than the end itself). For example, is increased hiring of social work staff best considered an outcome, or an indispensable activity intended to contribute to outcomes? Similar outcomes (e.g., improved collaboration and teamwork and better coordination among service providers) should be combined. A few instances of apparently unnecessary repetition have been carried over into the current revised plan.

Moreover, it would seem that some outcomes deserve priority status, based on the number of times they are mentioned, notably, the expansion of community-based services, implementation of Community Centered Practice and Group Work Practice models, and the expansion of family preservation services. If so, these outcomes should be featured in some way.

Most importantly, however, each system outcome should be stated in clearly measurable terms. As it stands most of the outcome language remains vague and imprecise. Improvement is certainly desirable, but how much improvement, and improvement in what ways? Increased number, but by how many? What does more stable adoptions mean, in measurable terms? What is a more responsive Independent Living Program? Each outcome should be operationalized in terms of at least one measure. Measures should in turn be incorporated into the plan matrix so that reporting personnel can remain attentive to data collection requirements.

4. Fourth, reexamine linkages among activities, system outcomes, and client outcomes. Especially for outcomes where progress is not being made, administrators

should ascertain the extent to which activities intended to achieve outcomes are in fact doing so, and consider appropriate changes.

5. Fifth, gear reporting to system outcomes rather than activities. The vast preponderance of material supplied the Board by DFCS staff continues to focus on the broad range of activity that appears in the plan, rather than on the outcomes these activities are designed to produce. Activity is of course essential, and comment upon it is appropriate, but without explicit connection to outcomes the relevance of such activity talk is questionable.

6. Finally, fill in the data gaps. It was not possible for the Board to determine progress toward outcomes in the case of two (2) of thirteen (13) client outcomes, and in fully thirty-one (31) of seventy-seven (77) system outcomes (over 40%). In virtually all cases, the problem is related to lack of data, including vaguely stated reports of one sort or another.

Appendix A
State Level Citizens Review Board
DFCS Progress toward Planned Client Outcomes

Client Outcome	Baseline FY 1998	CY 2000	CY 2001	Progress from baseline
S1: Reduce the number of subsequent substantiated reports for children known to the agency.	553	510 (9 mos.)	311 (9-mos.)	Yes
S2: Reduce the number of substantiated abuse and neglect cases of children placed in homes licensed by the agency.	11	11	4	Yes
S3: Reduce the number of re-entries into agency custody due to abuse or neglect.	72	35	27 (9 mos.)	Yes
S4: Reduce the number of children entering state custody.	1121	2385 (9 mos.)	1103 (9 mos.)	No
S5: Increase the number of children who are safely united with family members.	51% of children leaving custody	81% (9 mos.)	73% (9 mos.)	Yes
S6: Reduce the average number of child fatalities due to maltreatment for children previously known to the agency.	10.75 (annual avg. between =95 B=98)	12	5	Yes
P1: Decrease the average number of placement moves per child in foster care.	2.29	2.41 (9 mos.)	2.23 (9 mos.)	Yes
P2: Reduce the average length of time in agency custody for children in foster care.	1.52 years	2.53 years (9 mos.)	2.30 years (9 mos.)	No
P3: Reduce the number of children in agency custody being placed in group homes, residential facilities, institutional settings and out-of-state care.	809	853 (9 mos.)	999 (9 mos.)	No
P4: Reduce the average length of time between the date a child enters foster care and the date of adoption.	2.14 years	3.63 years	3.79 years	No
WB1: Increase the number of cases in which families demonstrate an increased capacity to meet their child/children's needs, preventing the children from entering custody and allowing child/children in custody to be returned to the family.	97% of families served	?	?	?
WB2: Children in custody have their educational, medical, dental and psychological needs met.	51% of children reunited	?	?	?
WB3: Increase the number of youth ages 14-21 years who participate in the Independent Living Program to prepare for independence.	415 (1999) (76% of those eligible)	429 (9 mos.) (81% of those eligible)	674 (9 mos.) (74% of those eligible)	Yes/number: No/percent eligible

Summary of Client Outcome Achievement:

Safety Outcomes Achieved: 5 of 6
 Permanency Outcomes Achieved: 1 of 4
 Well-Being Outcomes Achieved: 1* of 3, with 2 unknown (*the outcome is narrowly achieved, in that the absolute numbers have increased; percentages have run below baseline, however.)

TOTAL: 7 of 13 client outcomes achieved.

Appendix B

State Level Citizens Review Board

DFCS Progress toward Planned System Outcomes

System Outcome	Good Progress	Some Progress	No or Negative Progress	Progress Unclear
Provide Family Preservation services statewide	X			
Provide statewide network of community services	X			
Improve access to legal assistance for families/children			X	
Replicable ISP Team model		X		
Statewide community-based family support services	X			
Replicable Group Work Practice model		X		
Inventory of services/assessment of community need		X		
Expanded training capacity				X
Model for statewide Quality Assurance Program		X		
New licensure standards for facilities	X			
Providers aware of new standards/requirements			X	
Adequate staff to monitor licensing standards			X	
Increased number and type of foster homes				X
Competencies for foster parents/workers/supervisors				X
Improved collaboration and teamwork				X
Better coordination among service providers				X
Annual report based on system review				X
Timely response to Administrative Hearing request			X	
Statewide model of safety/risk/family assessment				X
Increased Family Preservation skills for staff	X			
Expand support services available to families		X		
Expanded services through community partnerships		X		
Expanded Family Preservation services statewide	X			
Provide Family Support services in each region	X			
Timely response to client needs at local level				X
Improved response to child abuse/neglect reports				X
Intensified reunification services			X	
Increased home-based services	X			
Intensified reunification services for fam/foster children				X
Expand Family Preservation services to at-risk families	X			
Statewide Child Fatality Review process	X			
Annual child fatality report based on review				X
Develop local teams reviewing child fatalities				X
Statewide system for MD Child Abuse Review	X			
Develop local teams reviewing child abuse cases	X			
Annual child abuse report based on system review				X
Expanded Family Centered Practice			X	
Increased number and type of placement options				X
Improved child welfare practice			X	
Increased Family Support services statewide		X		
Timely response to family needs at local level				X

Local resources available		X		
Increased hiring of social workers			X	
Statewide Concurrent Permanency Planning Practice	X			
Improved understanding of permanency by courts			X	
Timely response to family needs at local level			X	
Increased pool of licensed foster homes				X
Increased accountability of contract providers for place		X		
Increased local resources				X
Improved coordination among state agencies		X		
Increased pool of adoptive families		X		
More attorneys available through the AG=s office			X	
Improved TPR case preparation			X	
Adequately staffed Adoption Program			X	
More stable adoptions				X
Increased adoptions	X			
More timely adoptions for foster children				X
Reduced adoption disruptions				X
Staff trained to facilitate adoptions		X		
Therapeutic services for adoptive children/families		X		
Legal assistance for adoptive families/children			X	
Safety, risk and well-being assessment process		X		
Statewide services inclusive of Social Group Work				X
Statewide automated child welfare system				X
Prepare providers/caregivers to administer good care				X
Complete medical history for each child in custody				X
Improved service provision on new cases				X
Enhanced service provision for children in care				X
Permanency Hearings in federal mandate compliance				X
Enhanced Family Centered Practice				X
14-21 yr. olds participate in Independent Living				X
Community services through partnerships				X
Increased stability for youth graduating from system				X
Improved data collection on system graduates		X		
Increased support of the Independent Living Program		X		
More responsive Independent Living Program		X		
Increased support for graduating youth		X		

Summary of System Outcomes

77 system outcomes:

- 14 = Good Progress
- 18 = Some Progress
- 14 = No/Negative Progress
- 31 = Unclear Progress