

# Child welfare matters.

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Spring, 2007

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States around the country have begun the second round of Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs). This issue provides information about the second round, including an overview of the changes and an interview with Jerry Milner of the Children's Bureau. We highlight the extensive assistance available to States through the Children's Bureau Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) Network and list other useful resources. We discuss using data during the second round, a key competency States need to produce evaluative Statewide Assessments and effective program improvement strategies. The QI Corner highlights the involvement of stakeholders, also emphasized in the second round.

*Your goal is to help children and families. Our goal is to help you.*

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Thank you.

Peter Watson, Director

## Child and Family Services Review: The Second Round

As part of ongoing efforts to make improvements in child welfare systems, the Children's Bureau has launched the second round of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). The CFSR will continue assessing the same seven outcomes and seven systemic factors through a Statewide Assessment, an Onsite Review, and Program Improvement Plans for areas needing improvement. Since all States went through these steps in the first round, they can build on lessons learned as they strive for improved practice and outcomes. During the second round, States will see shifts in emphasis, improvements in the process, and new measures and composites used to assess permanency.

**Evaluative Statewide Assessments:** In the Statewide Assessment, the Children's Bureau expects States to use an evaluative approach which does not just present current data (e.g., the reentry rate is 9%), but assesses why the State is performing as it is (i.e., reasons for the rate). In each section of the Statewide Assessment, States should use descriptive language for a brief overview that sets the context, and then use evaluative language to explain their performance. Exploratory questions under each Item in the Federal Statewide Assessment instrument guide States to examine what they have done in the past, what is happening now and factors that will affect what they could do in the future, including:

- factors that affect the State's performance and help explain the data (especially for Items linked to national standards);
- changes made in practice, policies and performance since the first Statewide Assessment, with an emphasis on PIP implementation (e.g., what changes were made to reduce reentry?);
- measures that demonstrate the State's effectiveness, including QA results and other data (e.g., what did QA results or data show on trends in reentry during this period?);
- issues affecting performance (e.g., data quality issues, casework practices, resource issues, regional issues, etc.); and
- explorations of what the State can do to improve performance (e.g., key collaborators in this area, strengths, promising approaches, barriers, etc.).

Continued on page 6.

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement

a service of the Children's Bureau, US Department of Health and Human Services

# Comments on the Second Round...

## An Interview with Jerry Milner, Senior Child Welfare Specialist

Jerry Milner is a senior child welfare specialist with the Children's Bureau of the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. He leads the federal review team that managed the first round of Child and Family Services Reviews, and is also taking a leading role in the second round.

### *What should States know about the second round of the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs)?*

I want States to think about how this entire process, including the initial CFSR, the subsequent CFSR, and the program improvement planning process, is really all about continuous improvement in our ability to serve children and families. It's not just about getting through one review.

The other thing is that the CFSR is the vehicle for bringing together the people within a State who can make a difference in the child welfare system, focusing on common goals and strategies. The reality is that child welfare agencies simply cannot make all the changes needed to improve outcomes without the full engagement of other stakeholders.

### *How are you expecting States to relate their work in the second round to the work they did in the first round of CFSRs?*

There's not a State in the country that can realistically correct all of the issues identified in the CFSR in one two-year Program Improvement Plan. The States that are going to be most effective in changing the culture of their child welfare programs have long-term goals and a clear vision of where they're trying to move their system. With that in mind, one Program Improvement Plan should build on another.

States that incorporated a CFSR approach into their ongoing work—continuously looking at outcomes, how practice affects outcomes, what the data tells them, what stakeholders say—are going to be so much better positioned to make needed improvements.

### *What are the most important changes in the CFSR review instruments?*

We are trying to get a more evaluative, less descriptive Statewide Assessment. In round two, we've revised the instrument to include examples of evaluative language. We want States to look at the Statewide Assessment not as a deliverable to us, but as an opportunity to learn more about their system, so that it supports them in their ongoing improvement efforts.

Overall the biggest change has been the automation of the process. In round one making sure the information was consistent across sites required enormous manual effort. We would like the focus to be on what the information tells us about practice and not so much about collecting, rating, reviewing, and doing quality assurance of instruments.

### *How would you recommend that States talk to stakeholders about the four permanency composites?*

In round one we used what now seem to be relatively simple one-indicator measures to try to explain State efforts to do things like get children adopted promptly. In reality, these are very complex areas within child welfare practice and the expansion to multidimensional data indicators reflects this reality.

For example, in round one, State child welfare agencies could only say to their stakeholders that they did or they did not do a good job reunifying children within 12 months. That was the one indicator we had, even though States may have been doing a lot of other things around reunification.

Now they can talk about children going home within 12 months, how long it takes to reunify, how quickly children newly entering foster care are reunified, and the permanency of reunifications. They have the chance to talk about where they're doing well and where they still need to improve, all under the umbrella of the composite on reunification.

### *Why did you add the new composite around achieving permanency for children in foster care for long periods of time?*

In round one, we saw many older children who had been in foster care for many years whose plans to remain in foster care were established early on in their lives and were not reconsidered. We're concerned that youth in foster care have the same opportunities for permanency and stability that any child newly entering foster care has, so we want to use our data measures to focus attention on those children.

### *Can you tell us about the stakeholder involvement that will be expected in the second round?*

The first thing I'd say is it's not optional. If any State child welfare agency is really serious about making improvements in safety, permanency and well-being of children, they know they can't cover all the bases alone. In round one what States called collaboration took a lot of different forms. It could range from inviting somebody to a meeting occasionally or sending out nearly final documents for review and comment, all the way up to fully engaging stakeholders in very meaningful ways—analyzing data, drafting documents, taking an active role in the CFSR process. It's that end of the spectrum we're pushing towards, which is full engagement. But in the end, only those people at the State level can assure that the collaboration is a meaningful activity.

### *Why is there an emphasis on collaborating with three specific groups—courts, Tribes and youth?*

The emphasis on courts goes back to the findings we had from round one. Not one State was in substantial conformity on Permanency Outcome 1. Of the seven systemic factors, fewer States were in substantial conformity on the Case Review System than any other factor. This is where court activity is a focus, and we found a statistical association between how well States do on case review and on permanency. We've emphasized collaboration with courts because we want to see changes in permanency for children.

The other two groups—youth and Tribes—come more from our observations in the field. We often heard from both groups that there was a need for more involvement.

Emphasizing these three groups in no way lessens the need to collaborate with other major stakeholders. If the State knows, for example, that it has huge issues around methamphetamines with families, it doesn't make any sense to deal with those issues without bringing the substance abuse people to the table.

### *You've mentioned the importance of incorporating a CFSR approach into ongoing work. What other advice would you give to States as they prepare for the second round?*

**Take care of data quality issues.** If you need technical assistance, get it early. If you need to resubmit data, do it early. We want to focus on substance and we can't do that unless we have accurate data.

**Make collaboration a way of life, not just an exercise for the CFSR.** In round one States that had strong relationships moving into the CFSR easily used those in the CFSR. The ones that had to develop relationships for the CFSR had the most trouble.

**Listen to your stakeholders.** When you get input, use that information as you think about the next Program Improvement Plan.

**Be honest with yourselves and with your stakeholders.** If the data are correct and do not show the results you're looking for, invest time and effort to figure out what program issues are driving the data rather than trying to discredit the data. I would say the same things about the Onsite Review. Be honest. If the results aren't exactly what you're looking for, try to figure out what they tell you about your system rather than just trying to discredit the review itself.

**Exercise leadership within States.** I can't overemphasize how important it is for the leadership within courts and agencies to drive the vision at all levels of the system and to take responsibility for moving the system in a positive direction. Leadership is absolutely critical to getting the kind of commitment and attention these improvement efforts need.

**Don't start over from scratch.** In the Statewide Assessment, States should consider what their prior efforts were—what worked, what didn't work? They should use data in more in-depth ways to understand the issues and use their QA results not just to rate themselves, but to understand what they're seeing.

**Engage the counties, and not just the three counties that will be reviewed during the Onsite Review.** If you're going to change outcomes, you've got to change practice and practice happens at the local level.

**Engage your State legislatures.** In many situations the legislature is the key to supporting and sustaining systemic reforms. It's important for agencies to bring them on board early rather than having them read about things in the newspaper.

**Request technical assistance in all areas early.** We've organized our entire technical assistance network around the goals and objectives we're trying to accomplish through this process.

States have what is both a burden and an opportunity to look at all the information generated through the CFSR and other data sources and to plan—with stakeholders—strategies that will result in better outcomes for children and families. We look forward to continuing to work with States in this ongoing process.



# Help from the National R

## From the National Resource Center on Child Welfare Data and Technology—NRC-CWDT

This resource center has a broad range of technical assistance (TA) and tools available to help States improve the quality of their data and to use it effectively throughout the CFSR process. The Center's TA focuses on helping agencies forge connections between data staff and program staff, and customizes tools and TA to each individual agency's level of accessing and using data. Major areas of TA include:

- **AFCARS TA:** During the second round of CFSRs, it is important for States to take a hard look at the quality of their AFCARS data, and to make sure their AFCARS mapping is correct so composites and other data indicators accurately reflect case outcomes. The NRC-CWDT provides an AFCARS toolkit and customized, detailed TA for program and data staff to look at whether AFCARS data reflect what is going on in the field and to work on issues together. In addition, the NRC-CWDT also provides TA on NCCANDS data.
- **State data profiles:** The NRC-CWDT provides a State Data Profile toolkit and onsite TA to help States understand and use the State data profiles that will be provided at the beginning of the Statewide Assessment period. The toolkit includes extensive information on reading and interpreting the profile, including an example and an exercise. The toolkit also provides information on the sources of the data and Frequently Asked Questions, and will include a reference guide to the data elements.
- **CFSR data indicators:** The NRC-CWDT provides TA on the data indicators in round two, with particular focus on understanding the measures that make up the four composites under Permanency Outcome 1. Staff will work closely with States to customize presentations to stakeholders on this topic, incorporating data and practice issues specific to that State.

Staff are available to meet with agency data and program staff to examine State data, discuss what it means, and develop strategies to dig deeper into the numbers. For example, agencies can look at specific population groups or areas of the State, or report and analyze the data on a regional, unit or worker level. This kind of analysis helps the State complete an evaluative Statewide Assessment and decide what actions it can take to make improvements. (See *Using Data to Make Improvements*, page 7.)

For more information or to discuss TA, contact [nrcpwdt@cwla.org](mailto:nrcpwdt@cwla.org) or 877-672-4829. For tools see: [www.nrcpwdt.org](http://www.nrcpwdt.org)

## RESOURCES:

### [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb):

- Under "Child and Family Services Review" find CFSR review instruments, Procedures Manual, planning documents and other resources, including: *Collaborating During the CFSRs* (Appendix J of the Procedures Manual).
- Under "Technical Assistance (TA) Support Projects" find information on publications and TA for state child welfare agencies on communicating with legislators.

### [nrcoi.org](http://nrcoi.org):

- The **CFSR Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) Package** provides guides for facilitated working sessions in 6 distinct focus areas leading up to and following the CFSR. Material is now available on our website. See details on page 5.
- The *2007 CFSR Toolkit for Youth Involvement*, available on the website later this spring, will include strategies, resources, and tips.

New publication available from  
**[www.nrcoi.org](http://www.nrcoi.org)**

### Coping with Disasters and Strengthening Systems



#### A Framework for Child Welfare Agencies

It is important for agencies caring for vulnerable populations—such as abused and neglected children—to do what they can to prepare for disasters. Fortunately, many of the steps agencies might take to prepare for disasters can also strengthen systems critical to ongoing agency management. This publication is meant to help managers think through what they might put in place to cope with disasters, and to highlight how taking these steps can improve systems for serving children and families.

# Resource Centers (NRCs)

## From the Children's Bureau's Training and Technical Assistance Network

The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (NRCOI) has worked with other NRCs to develop a comprehensive CFSR Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) Package. Developed to help States derive the most benefit from the CFSR process, the package consists of guides for facilitated working sessions, each covering a distinct focus area. Each working session combines presentation of content with planning by participants for the State's implementation of the content. Focus areas 1-4 are designed to help States build capacity and prepare for the CFSR:

1. Strategic Planning
2. Strengthening Child Welfare Supervision as a Key Practice Change Strategy
3. Engaging Community Stakeholders and Building Community Partnership
  - a. Engaging Courts and Legal Systems
  - b. State-Tribal Partnerships
  - c. Engaging Birth Parents, Family Caregivers and Youth
4. Using Information and Data in Planning and Measuring Progress

Focus areas 5 and 6 are used during the CFSR and PIP process, with the agency leading the sessions with onsite support from NRCs and the Federal Regional Office:

5. CFSR Kick Off
6. Program Improvement Planning

The NRCOI begins by meeting with agency leaders, and works to understand their hopes and goals for the second round. Agency leadership and staff work with NRCOI staff to select focus areas that will be offered, and to customize the material to meet their needs.

For more information, contact the NRCOI at [helpkids@usm.maine.edu](mailto:helpkids@usm.maine.edu) or 1-800-435-7543, or see our website: [www.nrcoi.org](http://www.nrcoi.org)

### NRCOI in the Field: *The CFSR T/TA Package in North Carolina*

NRCOI staff held a conference call with North Carolina after the agency expressed interest in the package, and then planned one day on site. During the morning, NRCOI staff met with agency leadership to discuss the first round of CFSRs (e.g., what went well, challenges) and current concerns. A smaller group met in the afternoon and selected three areas for assistance—engaging stakeholders, working with Tribes and collaborating with courts. A workgroup to guide TA for each of these areas was formed, consisting of State staff, stakeholders, and NRCOI staff. TA using material from the package will include:

- strategic planning assistance for an existing statewide stakeholder collaborative;
- consultation with State staff on State-Tribal collaboration to raise awareness of Tribal issues; and
- regular meetings between the agency and court representatives to increase collaboration.



### Visit our website: **[www.nrcoi.org](http://www.nrcoi.org)**

For information about technical assistance services, the Children's Bureau's Training and Technical Assistance Network, our publications and teleconferences, child welfare news and useful links.

### **While there, tell us what you think.**

To keep our services as useful to you as possible, we have posted a quick online survey to our website:

**<http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/survey.htm>**

Please take a moment to give us feedback.

# Child and Family Services Review: The Second Round

from page 1

**Collaboration with critical partners:** The Children’s Bureau continues to emphasize collaborating with stakeholders as critical to improving the complex systems serving children and families. During round two there is a particular emphasis on engaging three types of partners—courts, Tribes and youth.

**Automation of instruments:** The CFSR Onsite Review Instrument and the Stakeholder Interview Guide have been automated to improve consistency of information and ease the process for all involved. Rating criteria and scales have been added to build consistency in answers and ratings across reviewers, and site and team leaders can review and comment on progress daily. The primary benefit for States will be aggregate data from case reviews and stakeholder interviews that are tallied automatically, so preliminary results will be available at the exit conference.

**Program Improvement Plan (PIP) calls:** The Children’s Bureau has added three PIP conference calls with States to be held after the Onsite Review, providing direction and support to States as they develop their PIPs.

**New data measures and composites:** As in round one, two of the seven outcomes have data indicators that quantify and help measure performance: Safety Outcome 1—children are protected from abuse and neglect; and Permanency Outcome 1—children have permanency and stability in their living situations. Data indicators refer to the two safety measures and four permanency composites for which national standards have been developed. There is little change in the Safety indicators but the four Permanency indicators now consist of more comprehensive data composites.

Composites are single numbers that incorporate performance across several related measures. A composite score is calculated from performance on each of the measures, each weighted to reflect its importance. A composite is like a class grade, where different weights are assigned to performance on different tasks (e.g., exams 60%, papers 25%, class participation 10%, homework 5%) to calculate a final grade.

Three composites cover familiar areas that have been expanded, and one covers an entirely new area. The four composites are:

- **Timeliness and permanence of reunification:** The round one measure of length of time to reunification has been expanded, and four measures now reflect the experience of all children (i.e., both those who exit in less than 12 months and those who stay longer) and add in considerations of whether reunifications are permanent (i.e., reentry rate).
- **Timeliness of adoptions:** This composite now expresses performance on five measures tracking different aspects of moving children to adoption.
- **Placement stability:** Three measures track the number of children in foster care with two or fewer placements for those in foster care for less than 12, 12–24, and more than 24 months.
- **Achieving permanence for children in foster care:** In this new composite, three measures track the experience of children in care for long periods of time.

Composite scores incorporate performance on a number of different measures and provide a more comprehensive and balanced view of an agency’s work by capturing a wider range of experiences. For example, under the timeliness of adoptions composite, different measures track the experiences both of children who exit to adoption within 24 months and those who wait many years. Using composites also ensures that assessing a State’s performance does not depend on one measure, and both strengths and weaknesses can be taken into account.

The National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology (NRC-CWDT) is providing technical assistance to States on data issues in the second round (See page 4). The NRC-CWDT recommends that States monitor their composite scores but focus on performance on individual measures that make up the composites. For each measure, States can compare their performance to the national median performance on that measure. States are also able to compare their performance to the national 25<sup>th</sup> percentile (when a lower number is preferable) and the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile (when a higher number is preferable). For example:

Measure	National Median	National 25 <sup>th</sup> /75 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	State’s Performance
Median length of stay to adoption (Lower number is preferable)	32.4 months	27.3 months (25 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	X months

There are no national standards for the individual measures within composites, so States can set their own performance goals. While there have been some shifts and changes, the primary focus on the CFSR remains the same: building stronger systems and achieving better outcomes for children and families served.

## Using Data to Make Improvements in Kentucky

During Kentucky's PIP period, State QI staff tracked performance on reentry rates and saw that rates were actually increasing, from 11 to 12%, when the national standard was set at 8%. These numbers indicated a trend, but Kentucky needed to know why the numbers were at this level and what they could do about it. To explore these questions, they further analyzed the data, looking at who was reentering, when and from where they were reentering. They discovered that a group of youth were emancipating from care at 18, but then voluntarily reentering the system to qualify for college assistance benefits offered by the State. In addition, they discovered that children 10 and older were much more likely to reenter than younger kids, and that children were most likely to reenter within the first four months of leaving care—if they made it to 12 months they were much less likely to reenter. They broke the data down to the local level, providing regions and units with reports highlighting those children at highest risk of reentry. CQI specialists worked with local teams to develop strategies to reduce reentry. Staff redirected family preservation resources to build additional services for families in the first year after reunification, urged courts to consider the data in making decisions about reunification and removal, and focused assistance on older children. By analyzing data and then acting on it at the local level, Kentucky reduced its reentry rate to the 9% range in the last year of the PIP.

## QI CORNER:

I've had the privilege of working with a number of states that prioritize partnerships with stakeholders in their QI systems. These states' experiences seem particularly relevant as we begin the second round of the CFSR during which stakeholder involvement is a main focus.

States involve stakeholders in many QI activities, from serving on and chairing QI committees to reviewing cases to developing systemic change strategies and monitoring improvements. More useful than a recitation of the ways stakeholders are involved, however, are examples of how states promote sustained involvement in QI. Inviting stakeholders to serve on committees is not enough. Child welfare agencies must give up some control and commit to ongoing, proactive support to achieve true collaboration. Here are some examples:

- **Staff stakeholder activities.** Agencies that devote staff to QI activities have more success in sustaining stakeholder involvement. These staff address logistical and substantive issues, serve as resources to QI committees, provide data, assist stakeholders in understanding and analyzing reports, and follow up on discussions.
- **Provide extra support for “nonprofessional” stakeholders.** Stakeholders such as youth and biological parents bring critical perspectives. However, meeting with other stakeholders who use unfamiliar language and acronyms may be off-putting or intimidating. Agencies can help “nonprofessional” stakeholders prepare before QI meetings and debrief with them afterwards to encourage continued input and participation.
- **Train stakeholders.** QI staff must prepare and train stakeholders for QI work and activities, providing assistance in interpreting child welfare data, using case review tools, formulating improvement strategies, etc.
- **Develop meaningful agendas.** Focus meeting agendas for specific stakeholder groups on relevant issues. Stakeholders take more ownership of the QI process when they have some control and interest in the topics discussed.
- **Set meeting dates and topics in advance.** Convening groups of multiple stakeholders can be a scheduling nightmare and sustaining consistent stakeholder attendance over time is difficult. In response, some agencies set QI meeting dates for an entire year, communicating topics and sending out materials well in advance of meetings.
- **Create charters.** To clarify overall goals and specific issues such as meeting procedures, membership requirements etc., some agencies develop charters with their QI stakeholder groups. These charters ensure a common understanding of the group's purpose, and may be modified over time.
- **Tell stakeholders they make a difference.** Stakeholders may not realize the impact of their involvement. Therefore, QI staff report back regularly about changes that have occurred as a result of stakeholder work.
- **Use targeted surveys.** Some agencies use targeted surveys to gather input from key stakeholder groups who may be more difficult to engage through one or two representatives on broad committee meetings.

If you have any questions or would like more specific information and examples, please get in touch.

Thanks, Peter



## Upcoming Teleconferences:

**April 30: Advocating for the Educational Needs of Children in Out-of-Home Care:  
The Colorado Experience**

**May 3: Strengthening Supervision**

### On Collaboration

**May 31: Building and Maintaining State-Tribal Partnerships to Improve Child Welfare Programs**  
*Cosponsored by The Collaboration to AdoptUsKids*

**June 14: Engaging Youth in the CFSR and Program Improvements**  
*Cosponsored by the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development*

**June 26: Engaging Courts and Building Court/Agency Collaboration**  
*Cosponsored by the National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues*

### On Data

**May 22: CFSR Data Indicators and Composites**  
*Cosponsored by the National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology*

**June 5: Using Data in the CFSR and Beyond**  
*Cosponsored by the National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology*

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