

## New Child and Family Services Reviews

This edition of Managing Care focuses on the new federal child and family services reviews. The reviews represent a major shift in approaches to federal monitoring of state child welfare programs. They will examine the outcomes achieved for children and families as well the functioning of major systems that establish the capacity to improve outcomes.

Our main article provides an overview of the new review process—what it is, how it will function, and what it means for states. To help you prepare, this issue also features an interview with a federal Administration on Children and Families (ACF) official responsible for implementation of the reviews as well as tips from a state that piloted the review process. We also include a list of resources that will be useful to you as you prepare for the review process.

Finally, this issue also discusses the new Annual Report on Child Welfare Outcomes, another effort to track child welfare outcomes nationally.

We believe that these assessments represent a significant opportunity for states to examine and improve the services they provide to children and families. We look forward to working with ACF and with other Resource Centers to assist states in planning and implementing improvements.

*Kris Sahonchik*

How well are states doing in achieving safety, permanency and well being for the children and families served by their child welfare programs? How well are the systems that promote better outcomes—such as case review systems and quality assurance systems—functioning? These are the questions to be examined through the new child and family services review process.

These new reviews will focus on assessing both the outcomes achieved for children and families and the systems that support improved outcomes. This emphasis on results is a major departure from previous federal review processes, which focused on whether states were in compliance with certain procedural requirements as evidenced by complete and accurate case documentation.

The outcomes focus of the new reviews is paired with an emphasis on involving states as partners in a continuous quality improvement process. States assess their own strengths and weaknesses at each stage of the review process. And unlike previous review processes, when weaknesses are identified, states have the opportunity to make improvements before they are penalized.

In designing the new review process, the Administration on Children and Families (ACF) engaged in extensive consultation with national organizations, and piloted the process in 14 states. Comments were received on proposed regulations, which were published in the Federal Register in September of 1998.

The content of the final rule, published on January 25, 2000, reflected the comments received on the proposed rule and the lessons learned from the pilots and the consultation process. The new rule calls for all states to undergo a review within four years from the effective date, March 25, 2000.

### The Focus of Reviews

The new reviews will focus on seven outcomes—divided among the broad areas of safety, permanency and well-being—as well as seven systemic factors. The seven outcomes are as follows:

#### Safety:

- Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
- Children are safely maintained in their own homes whenever possible.

#### Permanency:

- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
- The continuity of family relationships and connections are preserved for children.

#### Child and Family Well Being:

- Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.
- Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

# New Child and Family Services Reviews

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Systemic factors are related to state agencies' capacity to deliver services leading to improved outcomes for children and families. Since all seven areas are State Plan requirements, the review process focuses on whether these systems are in place and functioning as required by federal regulations and statutes. The seven systemic factors are:

- Statewide information system
- Case review system
- Quality assurance system
- Staff training
- Service array
- Agency responsiveness to the community
- Foster and adoptive parent recruitment, licensing and retention

## The Review Process

Child and family service reviews will be conducted in two stages—a statewide assessment and a subsequent on-site review. Six months prior to the on-site review, ACF will transmit to a state its data profile showing its performance on indicators of safety and permanency. During the statewide assessment, states and external partners work together to analyze the outcomes achieved and to examine the systems in place within the state.

This analysis will be an opportunity for states to look behind the numbers to examine what is happening to children and families in the state. Reports will be due 60 days before the on-site review is scheduled.

To prepare for the on-site review, ACF reviews the statewide assessment and prepares their own preliminary assessment. ACF personnel will also work with states to identify state-specific issues. In addition, ACF and states will work together to determine the location of review sites and the size and composition of the sample for the on-site review.

During the on-site review, a joint federal and state team, including external stakeholders, will conduct intensive reviews of 30-50 cases at three locations in the state, including the largest metropolitan area. The team will also conduct stakeholder interviews in various locations to obtain input on outcomes and to evaluate system performance. The review team presents preliminary findings at an exit conference, and a final report is sent to the state within 30 days that identifies which of the seven outcomes and seven systemic factors are in or out of substantial conformity with applicable requirements.

A critical aspect of the new review process is the next step. If a state is not in substantial conformity on any of the fourteen outcomes and systemic factors, penalties will be determined. However, these penalties will be suspended if the state develops and implements a program improvement plan designed to correct the areas of non-conformity.

### State Child and Family Services Reviews, FY 2001

The following seventeen states are scheduled to complete child and family services reviews in the fiscal year that ends September 30, 2001:

Arizona  
Arkansas  
Delaware  
District of Columbia  
Florida  
Georgia  
Indiana  
Kansas  
Massachusetts  
Minnesota  
New Mexico  
New York  
North Carolina  
North Dakota  
Oregon  
South Dakota  
Vermont

## Substantial Conformity

For each of the outcomes and systemic factors, a number of performance indicators will be evaluated. Performance on these indicators will be used to determine whether States are in substantial conformity on each outcome and systemic factor.

### On Outcomes...

There are two types of indicators for each of the seven outcomes:

- statewide data indicators, which will compare state performance to national standards, and
- on-site indicators, which will be examined in individual cases on site and rated as a "strength" or an "area needing improvement."

ACF has identified six statewide data indicators that will be used to assess substantial conformity on safety and permanency outcomes. These indicators are:

- recurrence of maltreatment
- child abuse or neglect by foster care provider
- foster care reentries
- stability of foster care placements
- length of time to achieve permanency goal of adoption
- length of time to achieve permanency goal of reunification

To assess substantial conformity, state performance on these indicators will be compared to a national standard. Standards will be developed through a process that involves compiling data from each of 51 jurisdictions for multiple time periods and arraying those data to identify the 75th percentile of performance. That number will be established as the national standard and will be held steady through the first round of reviews.

All of the statewide data indicators for any given outcome must meet the national standard in order for the state to be in substantial conformity on that outcome.

Use of on-site indicators to assess substantial conformity is somewhat more complex:

- Four of the seven outcomes have only one or two associated on-site indicators. In these cases, all of the indicators must be rated as “strengths” for the outcome to be considered “substantially achieved”.
- Three outcomes have three or more on site indicators. For these outcomes to be “substantially achieved” no more than one of the indicators can be rated an “area needing improvement”.
- In the first round of reviews, 90% of the cases must be judged to have substantially achieved an outcome for the state to be in substantial conformity on that outcome. In subsequent reviews, that figure increases to 95%.

### **On systemic factors...**

The seven systemic factors will be reviewed on site and through the statewide assessment. Between one and five State IV-B plan requirements will be assessed for each systemic factor.

For the systemic factors with one State plan requirement, that requirement must be in place and functioning as described. Systemic factors with two to five State plan requirements will be determined to be in substantial conformity if no more than one of the requirements fails to function at the level described in the requirement.

A complete list of the indicators for each outcome and systemic factor is available in the ***Child and Family Service Review Procedures Manual*** at the Children's Bureau website, [www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb).

## **Program Improvement Plans**

ACF will work with states that find that they are not in substantial conformity on the outcomes or systemic factors to develop a program improvement plan. According to federal regulations, program improvement plans must set forth the action steps that will be taken to correct identified weaknesses. In addition, program improvement plans must also establish benchmarks that will be used to measure the State's progress in implementing the steps in the plan, and means of evaluating their effectiveness.

For example, one of the pilot states identified high levels of repeat maltreatment as a concern. In response, the state has developed a safety assessment tool and conducted intensive training in its use throughout the state. The pilot state is working with their federal regional office and with resource centers to develop a means of measuring the impact of the new assessment tool on safety outcomes.

If a state's data indicators do not meet the national standard, its program improvement plan must define the percentage increase towards the national standard that the state will achieve. The program improvement plans must also address the state's need for federal technical assistance, which will be provided through federal regional offices and federally funded Resource Centers, or through other sources identified by the state. If the state implements the plan as agreed and successfully completes the plan, penalties will be rescinded.

The new review process provides an opportunity for states to examine their outcomes and their systems and to make improvements over time. Their aim is to spur continual effort to assess and improve performance, resulting in state systems that are more effective in meeting the needs of children and families.

## **RESOURCES**

The Children's Bureau website, [www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb) has valuable information to help states prepare for the new reviews. Look for:

- Complete text of the federal regulations on the new review process, published on January 25, 2000
- Training Slides on Child and Family Service Reviews
- Questions and Answers on the January 25, 2000 Regulations
- Tentative Schedule of Reviews
- Procedures Manual
- Child and Family Services Review Instruments and Instructions, including:
  - Statewide Assessment
  - On-site Review Instruments and Instructions
  - Stakeholder Interview Guide
  - Summary of Findings Form

The Child Welfare Review Project is disseminating information on the reviews on behalf of the Children's Bureau. Their website, [www.childwelfarereview.com](http://www.childwelfarereview.com) includes copies of many of the documents on the review process. They are also providing hard copies of the Procedures Manual and the Review Instruments and Instructions. Call 301-495-1080, ext. 3249 or email [cw@jbs1.com](mailto:cw@jbs1.com). Federal Regional Offices can also provide information to states on the review process.

“Discussion Ideas for Initial Meeting or Conference Call with States to plan for CFS Review”. This document was developed by Vermont as a result of the state's initial meeting with the Region 1 office to prepare for the CFS review. For a copy, contact Linda Mitchell, ACF Region 1, 617-565-1157 or [lmitchell@acf.dhhs.gov](mailto:lmitchell@acf.dhhs.gov).

**More Resources on page 8**

# Comments on the new reviews...

## **Q What do you think is most important for states to know about the review process?**

The most important message is that the child and family service reviews are intended to improve child welfare practice nationally. We believe strongly that states want improved outcomes for children and families and want to make practice improvements where needed, and we know this review process can help them achieve those goals.

As states consider preparing for the reviews, it may be somewhat easier to focus on the technicalities of the review process, which are very important. However, we encourage states to also focus on what the reviews are intended to accomplish, which is improved outcomes for children and families.

When states ask what they can do to prepare for the review, I tell them to look at what is happening with children and families in their states. Look at the data, clean it up if necessary, then examine the factors behind the data that influence the numbers. While it may be more difficult to look globally at outcomes and to address improving outcomes, these are the areas we know states are concerned about and the areas we are most interested in targeting through the child and family service reviews.

One of the strengths of the review process is that it emphasizes child welfare practice. We know that the experience a family has through its interaction with the child and family services agency has very powerful effects on outcomes. What happens between a caseworker and a family, the quality of the case planning process, strategies used to engage families, how families' needs are assessed and matched to services, all have huge impacts on outcomes. In the pilots we found that state child welfare directors were really eager to know more about child welfare practice in their states.

We also learned in the development and piloting of the reviews that the entire process is essential to obtaining a balanced and holistic view of state child and family service programs. The statewide assessment and the state's data on safety and permanency provide a broad overview of the state's system, and they often prompt questions that states should explore and that the reviews can address on-site in the state. The two parts of the review process, the statewide assessment and the on-site review, are complementary. We need both the broad statewide perspective provided by the statewide assessment, but we also need the detailed, close up picture of why things are the way they are that we get with the more qualitative on-site review process.

## **Q Could you talk a little bit about the statewide assessment process?**

We have been careful to make sure that the statewide assessment is not simply an exercise where the states feed numbers back to us, but that states examine the sense behind the numbers and explore why things are the way they are. Again, it is sometimes easier to adopt a reporting or describing approach to completing the statewide assessment, but if states take that approach they are only telling us what they already know about their systems rather than using the process to learn more about their system.

We want this to be an analytical process, where states are really evaluating their own systems and finding out what is working well and what is not. For example, rather than asking the states to merely report the number of children who have repeat entries into foster care, we ask them to explore the reasons their children re-enter foster care and discuss how they are addressing those factors. We want to use the entire review process to help states engage in on-going self-evaluation and to examine their own performance, not just because we require it, but also because it gives them valuable insights and information they can use for decision-making.

The requirement to involve external partners in the statewide assessment is, we think, one of the most thoughtful parts of process. It reflects the requirement that states engage in consultation with a broad array of stakeholders and representatives in developing the state Title IV-B plan.

We are taking that consultation process a step further by involving the external partners not just in planning but also in evaluating the child welfare system. External stakeholders bring a degree of objectivity to the process that is often difficult to obtain when only state staff examine their system, and it is sometimes difficult to see the effects of the states' services on children and families. External partners provide a broader perspective and bring a measure of balance to the process.

## from Jerry Milner

*Jerry Milner is a child welfare policy specialist with the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and has taken a lead role in implementing the new child and family services reviews. He was formerly Director of the Family Services Division of the Alabama Department of Human Resources, where he was involved in developing a quality assurance review system that parallels the new federal review process. In this interview in late August, he responded to questions from the Resource Center about the new review process.*



**Q How do you suggest states go about involving external partners in the statewide assessment process?**

We haven't prescribed specific ways that this must happen, although there are several possibilities. In the regulations that implement the Child and Family Service Plan (CFSP), we have described the types of representatives with whom states should consult in developing their State Title IV-B plans. These are the same types of representatives that states should work with in the CFS review process.

In the pilot reviews, states used different approaches to obtain the perspectives of these representatives on the issues raised through the statewide assessment. Some states conducted focus groups where issues were posed in a group setting; some engaged in individual consultation; some took an initial cut at drafting portions of the assessment and then asked external partners to review and comment. The important thing is that the state actually solicits and uses meaningful input from external representatives in the statewide assessment.

In addition to having external representatives involved in the statewide assessment, we require that the state membership on the on-site review team consist of state agency staff as well as individuals who are not state employees. While all of the external partners who participate in the statewide assessment will not necessarily participate in the on-site review, some of them will be involved, and it makes sense to build strong working relationships with those partners during the statewide assessment process.



**Q How will the systemic factors be evaluated?**

Information from both the statewide assessment and the on-site review is used to determine substantial conformity on the systemic factors. The systemic factors are based on State plan requirements under Titles IV-E and IV-B. In the statewide assessment, states identify the extent to which they have the required systems and procedures in place, and discuss the effectiveness of the factors with regard to the outcomes for children and families.

In the on-site review, we have an opportunity to determine whether the systemic factors are actually functioning as required. For instance, one of the requirements of the systemic factor, case review system, is that foster and pre-adoptive parents are notified of hearings concerning children in their care. During the on-site review we explore whether that requirement is being carried out through interviews with foster and pre-adoptive families, court representatives, caseworkers, guardians ad litem, and other stakeholders.

**Q Can you talk a little bit about the progress you expect states to make during the implementation of program improvement plans?**

The program improvement plans are probably the most crucial part of the review process, in that they will provide a framework for improving outcomes in states. They provide opportunities for States to implement program improvements where needed and a means by which we can hold States accountable for making such improvements.

Our top priority for improved outcomes is in the area of child safety. Where the reviews indicate a need for improvements in child safety, those outcomes must be given priority in implementing the program improvement plans.

We know that states currently vary widely in their performance across all the outcomes and systemic factors, and that performance in the data and other measures used in the reviews is affected by different circumstances in different states. We also know that the level of effort and the strategies required to make improvements will vary among states. The program improvement plans will include consideration of these factors and provide specific provisions for evaluating progress over time.

**Q What do you advise states to do to prepare for the review process?**

Preparing for a child and family service review is not unlike preparing to undertake a significant reform effort within a state's child and family service system. It requires the state to engage in considerable self-examination and to emphasize the results of its work with children and families. There are some practical steps that a state can take to prepare for this process, as follows:

One of the first things states should do is evaluate the thoroughness and accuracy of their data. States should look at their NCANDS and AFCARS data to ensure that they are complete and accurate. If they have not made submissions for the time periods under review, they should immediately plan to make the submissions or, in the absence of NCANDS, identify an alternate source of data for use in generating the data profiles needed for the statewide assessment. The earlier states examine and clean up their data, the better prepared they will be for the reviews.

States scheduled for CFS reviews in FY 2001 should consider issues such as how they will involve community representatives in the statewide assessment; strengthening or developing community relationships that will be important in the reviews and beyond; and identifying their

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## from Jerry Milner

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needs for technical assistance, if any, in completing the statewide assessment; and familiarizing key people in the agency with the review process. They should also review the procedures manual and the review instruments thoroughly so they understand the process and how the reviews will be conducted.

For those states that have reviews scheduled in 2002 or beyond and, thus, are not scheduled to begin the statewide assessment for awhile, they should focus heavily on practice issues and help their staff step back and look at outcomes. State agencies can do an analysis of current policies and practices, and evaluate whether they are supporting or leading to the outcomes in safety, permanency and well-being that we are striving to achieve.

For example, a state could examine parental involvement in the case planning and service delivery processes and consider whether current policies and practices that are now in place encourage or discourage parental involvement. States can conduct practice runs of the statewide assessment instrument and start to identify their programmatic strengths and needs. They can work on developing or strengthening the working partnerships between staff and foster parents and caretakers, as well as with community agencies. They should also work to increase their reliance on the use of data within the agency to understand what is happening with children and families.

## More Tips on Preparing for the Reviews...

The team leaders from Rhode Island who orchestrated that state's recent participation in the last of the pilot child and family services reviews have produced a Handbook on lessons learned during the review process. "Child and Family Services Review: Rhode Island Pilot 2000: A Handbook for Surviving the Process and Keeping the Focus", discusses the key lessons learned for each stage of the review "journey."

This document provides a rich source of practical information on how to conduct the reviews. A sample of key tips include:

- Send staff to participate in another state's review before engaging in your own.
- Determine what your state's goal is in the review, and what you want to learn through the process.
- Build ownership in the review process by publicizing the review to administrators, throughout the agency (especially to supervisors), and to the public.
- Form a review committee early on charged with directing and overseeing the process. Include federal representatives, the department and community representatives.
- Don't reinvent the wheel - begin with the state's current child and family services (IV-B) plan. The author of Rhode Island's IVB plan was able to meet with the team leaders to identify what questions were addressed in the plan and what additional information was needed.
- Openness to the state's needs and limitations pays off in the end. In Rhode Island, the state staff and their partners were able to identify both the state's needs and strengths in a way that was productive and non-defensive.
- Timing is everything. Once the sample for the on-site review was pulled from the data, it took much more time than anticipated to contact the families and find the appropriate number who was willing to participate. Supervisors and caseworkers whose cases were chosen for review felt they needed more lead time to schedule the key participants for interviews and to prepare copies of the record for the reviewers

- In training the review teams, provide copies of state policies and use a "real" case to provide a frame of reference for questioning
- Carefully match review teams of federal representatives and in-state representatives in advance of the reviews so they can network and get to know one another. Meeting the Sunday night before the review for dinner was helpful.
- In assigning cases to review teams, pre-screen the cases. Some will have only been open for a brief period and not provide sufficient information to complete the review instrument, in-home cases require much less time, and more complex cases need to be distributed across reviewers to ensure an equitable distribution of work.
- Widely distribute the Final Report. It can be a vehicle to capture the attention of the executive and legislative branches and secure additional budget allocations.

The authors intend to continue to update this Handbook to add more detail and to comment on lessons learned as the state develops and implements program improvement plans.

For information on how to obtain a copy of "Child and Family Services Review: Rhode Island Pilot 2000: A Handbook for Surviving the Process and Keeping the Focus" contact the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement at 1-800-435-7543 or by e-mail at [patn@usm.maine.edu](mailto:patn@usm.maine.edu)

# The Annual Report: More National Outcome Data...

Section 203 of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 requires the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to develop a set of outcome measures that can be used to assess the performance of states in operating child welfare systems. It also calls for DHHS to report annually to Congress on state performance on these measures. The first Annual Report, "Child Welfare Outcomes, 1998: Annual Report" was released in August 2000.

The Annual Report provides data on state performance on seven outcomes and thirteen associated performance measures. The outcomes capture essential performance features related to safety and permanency. They include:

- Reduce recurrence of child abuse and/or neglect
- Reduce the incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care
- Increase permanency for children in foster care
- Reduce time in foster care to reunification without increasing reentry
- Reduce time in foster care to adoption
- Increase placement stability
- Reduce placements of young children in group homes or institutions

The Annual Report presents data on these outcomes through state data pages and through an Annual Summary of state child welfare data. Data in the report is drawn from state submissions to two national data collection systems - the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). The first Annual Report is based on 1998 AFCARS data and 1997 NCANDS data. Use of these existing data sets has allowed the Administration for

Children and Families (ACF) of the DHHS to produce outcome reports without requiring additional reporting by states.

States were given an opportunity to review their own outcome data on their state data pages prior to publication of the Annual Report. State comments clarifying their data submissions or identifying factors that might have affected performance are included along with the data in the report. The state data pages also provide additional information for understanding the context of each State's performance on the outcome measures. A context data section includes demographic information on each state's general population, and data on the numbers of children reported to child protective services, in foster care, waiting to be adopted and adopted.

Comparison across states on their performance on the outcome measures is difficult due to variations in state population demographics, programs and policies. ACF intends to assess state performance not by comparing states to one another but by tracking a state's own continuous improvement over time. The state outcome data in the Annual Report are presented as a baseline and each state's performance in subsequent years will be measured against its own performance in the past.



The Annual Summary section of the Annual Report presents a picture of the status of children receiving services from state child welfare agencies based on a sample of 30 states with the most comprehensive data submissions to NCANDS and AFCARS. The 30 states were selected based on the following criteria:

- The state must have provided data for at least 9 of the 13 outcome measures and
- The state must have provided data for at least 70% of all exits of children from foster care and included data on exits to adoption

An individual state can use the Annual Summary to compare its performance on the outcome measures to the average performance of these thirty states. This will provide some idea of the state's performance relative to the aggregate. However, states need to bear in mind that the sample only includes data from 30 states and should not be regarded as national statistics.

To the extent possible, the child welfare outcome measures found in the Annual Report have been coordinated with the statewide data indicators used in the child and family services reviews. Six of the outcome measures being tracked in the Annual Report will also be used in the child and family service review process, and ACF will use common definitions for these measures. The six measures are:

- Incidence of repeat maltreatment
- Incidence of maltreatment by a foster care provider
- Length of time to achieve adoption
- Length of time to achieve reunification
- Incidence of foster care re-entries
- Stability of foster care placements

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# The Annual Report

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In both the Annual Report and the child and family services reviews, ACF is making increasing use of the data submitted by states to national data sets. This provides an incentive for states to ensure that their data submissions are complete, and accurately reflects what is happening to children and families served by the child welfare system. As data systems are strengthened, states will increasingly be able to use their own data to continuously evaluate the quality of child welfare services.

The content of the first Annual Report, "Child Welfare Outcomes 1998: Annual Report" is available at the Children's Bureau website at <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb>. Copies can also be obtained through the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information at 1-800-394-3366 or by e-mail at [nccanch@calib.com](mailto:nccanch@calib.com)

## MORE RESOURCES

### Teleconferences

#### **Federal Review Standards**

On April 4, 2000, the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement hosted this teleconference on the new federal emphasis on outcomes, both in the Annual Report and the child and family services reviews. Two federal officials discussed these efforts and answered state questions. An audiotape and handout package from this session is available from the Resource Center at 1-800-435-7543 (\$10)

#### **Upcoming...**

Watch for more teleconferences early in 2001 on the new child and family services reviews. If you are not on the mailing list for the teleconference calendar, and would like to receive one, call the Resource Center at 1-800-435-7543 or email [patn@usm.maine.edu](mailto:patn@usm.maine.edu).



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National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement  
Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service  
University of Southern Maine  
PO Box 15010, One Post Office Square  
Portland, ME 04112

Kris Sahonchik, Director



Tel: 207-780-5810  
Toll Free: 1-800-HELP KID  
Fax: 207-780-5817  
TTY: 207-780-5646  
email: [patn@usm.maine.edu](mailto:patn@usm.maine.edu)

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