



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



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

June 2006

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Executive Summary

In December 2005, the Minnesota Department of Human Services reviewed the child welfare system in Clay County. The purpose of the Minnesota Child and Family Service Review is to identify strengths and areas needing improvement in child welfare practice and systems, with an emphasis on partnering with counties to use the results to plan for program improvements.

Findings for the Clay County review were derived from an assessment prepared by the county agency, their performance on national standard indicators, the ratings on outcomes and performance items from the on-site case review and input from community stakeholders. Self assessment findings were based on the county agency's evaluation of eight systemic factors and review of safety and permanency data. Clay County identified the case review system, service array, resource development and agency responsiveness to the community among their strengths. Areas needing improvement included recruitment of foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in need of such homes. Clay County met four of six national standard indicators, including incidence of child abuse/neglect in foster care, stability of foster care placements, length of time to achieve reunification and length of time to achieve adoption. The national standards for recurrence of maltreatment and foster care re-entries were not met and will be addressed by the county in their Program Improvement Plan.

The on-site case review consisted of an intensive examination of 12 cases, selected at random, of children in the child welfare system during the period under review. Clay County met substantial conformity on three of the safety, permanency and well-being outcomes. The county had ratings of strength on 14 of 24 performance items. The county had the strongest findings in the areas of the first Safety Outcome and second Well-being Outcome. Performance items related to the first Well-being Outcome were the most often rated as Areas Needing Improvement. It is important to recognize that ratings were based on a relatively small sample of cases measured against high performance standards.

Information received from community stakeholder interviews was largely consistent with the county self assessment and findings from case reviews. In addition to systemic strengths described by the agency, stakeholders added information regarding the county's willingness to collaborate with their community partners and creativity in locating or developing resources to meet identified needs. Additional areas needing improvement included consistency in relative search practices and practices related to the screening of maltreatment reports.

Clay County will prepare a Program Improvement Plan to address those outcome and performance items that were not rated in substantial conformity or as strengths, within 90 days of receiving this report. The Quality Assurance staff of the Minnesota Department of Human Services is available to assist with identifying appropriate strategies and interventions for the Program Improvement Plan. Clay County should be encouraged that the review recognized systemic strengths and areas of child welfare practice that will provide a strong foundation to planning for program improvements designed to promote positive outcomes for children and families.

Introduction

The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) conducted a Minnesota Child and Family Service Review of the child welfare system in Clay County in December 2005. Findings for the Clay County review were derived from the self assessment prepared by the county agency, performance on national standard indicators, the ratings on outcomes and performance items from the on-site case review, and input from community stakeholders.

The review team consisted of two supervisors and one child protection worker from Clay County, one children's services supervisor from a neighboring county, one mental health professional, an individual from the state court administrator's office, one guardian ad litem and one DHS employee. DHS staff provided on-site coordination and assistance, reviewed the county's self assessment document, conducted case reviews, appraised case record reviews, facilitated community stakeholder interviews, and presented preliminary findings to agency administration and staff at an exit conference.

The Clay County self assessment provided an overall assessment of Strengths and Areas Needing Improvement focusing on those areas that warranted further examination in the on-site review. Program areas identified as Strengths included agency placement prevention practices and the use of Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) at various stages of a case. Systemic factors identified as Strengths included the case review system, service array, resource development and agency responsiveness to the community. Systemic factors identified as Areas Needing Improvement included recruitment of foster and adoptive homes that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in need of such homes.

Twelve cases of children in the child welfare system from September 1, 2004, through August 31, 2005, were reviewed. Five in-home and seven placement cases were reviewed. The most frequently cited primary reasons for agency involvement with the child or family included neglect, physical abuse, abandonment and methamphetamine use by parent(s). Emotional maltreatment, mental and/or physical health of parent(s), alcohol use by parent(s) and children's behavior were cited as secondary problems in a number of the cases.

The on-site case reviews included interviews with key participants in the cases. Forty case-related interviews were conducted, which consisted of two children, eight mothers, four fathers, one relative, three foster parents, three guardian ad litem, four providers and 15 caseworkers. Twenty-six of the interviews were conducted in person and 14 by phone.

Seven community stakeholder interviews were completed. Six of the interviews included multiple participants and were conducted as focus groups. Community stakeholders included agency caseworkers, agency administration, district court judges, the county attorney's office, foster parents, a public defender, law enforcement, school representatives, court services, public health services and other service providers.

The following tables summarize Clay County's performance on national standard indicators; Safety, Permanency and Well-being outcomes; and related performance items. It is important to remember that outcome and performance item ratings are based on a relatively small sample of

case records and are measured against a high level of performance expectation. Records selected for the review are presumed to be representative of agency practice and their compliance with statutes, policies and standards. Case-related interviews are used to augment information found in the case record and contribute significantly to the overall findings.

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

Data Indicator	National Standard	County 2004	Minnesota 2004
The national standard for recurrence of maltreatment is met if, of all children who were victims of determined maltreatment during the first six months of the period under review, 6.1 percent or fewer children have another determined report within six months.	6.1% ↓	6.7%	5.1%
The national standard for incidence of child abuse/neglect in foster care is met if, of all children in foster care, the percentage of children who were the subject of determined maltreatment by a foster parent is 0.57 percent or less.	0.57% ↓	0.0% *	0.18%
The national standard for foster care re-entries is met if, of all children who entered foster care, 8.6 percent or fewer of those children re-entered foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care placement.	8.6% ↓	21.6%	22.7%
The national standard for stability of foster care placements is met if, of all children who have been in foster care less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal, 86.7 percent or more had no more than two placement settings.	86.7% ↑	95.5% *	91.6%
The national standard for length of time to achieve reunification is met if, of all children who were reunified with their parents or caretakers at the time of discharge from foster care, 76.2 percent or more were reunified in less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal from home.	76.2% ↑	93.7% *	91.9%
The national standard for length of time to achieve adoption is met if, of all children who exited care to a finalized adoption, 32 percent or more exited care in less than 24 months.	32.0% ↑	80.0% *	40.4%

*The county met the national standard.

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

OUTCOME AND PERFORMANCE ITEMS		% Substantially Achieved	% Strength	Requires Program Improvement Plan
SAFETY OUTCOME 1	Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect	91.7%		
ITEM 1	Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment		87.5%	No
SUPPLEMENT ITEM	Screening decisions and thoroughness of assessments		100%	No
ITEM 2	Repeat maltreatment		100% *	Yes
SAFETY OUTCOME 2	Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate	83.3%		
ITEM 3	Services to family to protect children in home and prevent removal		100%	No
ITEM 4	Risk of harm to child		83.3%	Yes
PERMANENCY OUTCOME 1	Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	57.1%		
ITEM 5	Foster care re-entries		33.3% *	Yes
ITEM 6	Stability of foster care placement		100%	No
ITEM 7	Permanency goal for child		100%	No
ITEM 8	Reunification or transfer of permanent legal and physical custody to a relative		100%	No
ITEM 9	Adoption		66.7%	Yes
ITEM 10	Permanency goal of long-term foster care		33.3%	Yes
PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2	The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children	100.0%		
ITEM 11	Proximity of foster care placement		100%	No
ITEM 12	Placement with siblings		100%	No
ITEM 13	Visits with parents and siblings in foster care		100%	No
ITEM 14	Preservation of connections		100%	No
ITEM 15	Relative placement		83.3%	No
ITEM 16	Relationship of child in care with parents		100%	No

WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1	Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs	41.7%		
ITEM 17	Needs and services of child, parents and foster parents		41.7%	Yes
ITEM 18	Child and family involvement in case planning		58.3%	Yes
ITEM 19	Worker visits with child		100%	No
ITEM 20	Worker visits with parents		75%	Yes
WELL-BEING OUTCOME 2	Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs	100%		
ITEM 21	Educational needs of child		100%	No
WELL-BEING OUTCOME 3	Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs	83.3%		
ITEM 22	Physical health of child		100%	No
ITEM 23	Mental health of child		80%	Yes

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

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

A Program Improvement Plan will be developed by the county in response to each outcome area where less than 90 percent of the cases were substantially achieved; each data indicator that did not meet the national standard; and for each performance item that was not rated as a Strength in at least 85 percent of the cases reviewed. The Program Improvement Plan is due 90 days after the receipt of this final report. Planning for program improvement is the most important part of the review process. The strategies for change and improvement of practice outlined in the county's plan will focus the agency's efforts on improving outcomes for the children and families they serve. The ratings on the safety, permanency and well-being outcomes from the Minnesota Child and Family Service Review will provide a baseline for measuring ongoing quality improvements.

This report provides a detailed examination of each outcome and performance item assessed in the Minnesota Child and Family Service Review. The status of each outcome is described in terms of cases substantially achieved and conformity with national standards. Findings of Strength or area needing improvement, determined by the case reviews, were made for each of the 23 performance items. Each item was analyzed regarding specific measures of the case review instrument and reviewer observations, including summaries of stakeholder input and self assessment information.

Evaluating the Findings: Safety

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.				
Number of cases reviewed according to degree of outcome achievement:				
	Total Number		Total Percentage	
Substantially achieved:	11		91.7%	
Partially achieved:	1		8.3%	
Not achieved or addressed:	0		0.0%	
Not applicable:	0		--	
Conformity of county data indicators with national standards:				
	National Standard	County Percentage	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard
Recurrence of maltreatment	6.1%	6.7%		X
Incidence of child abuse/neglect in foster care	0.57%	0.0%	X	

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 1

Safety Outcome 1 evaluates the following performance items:

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

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

Clay County did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings: while the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 91.7 percent of the cases reviewed, they met one of two national standards associated with this item.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

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

Response) required person-to-person contact with the family within five working days from the date the report was accepted for an assessment. For reports received on or after August 1,2005, state policy requires an immediate response to reports of maltreatment that indicate a child is in imminent danger. When a report does not indicate a child is in imminent danger, state policy requires initiation of the investigation or assessment, and face-to-face contact with the family within five calendar days of the date the report is accepted for assessment. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 1 was rated a Strength in four of five in-home cases and all three applicable placement cases, or 87.5 percent of all applicable cases.
- Item 1 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in one applicable case (12.5 percent).
- Item 1 was Not Applicable in four cases.

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

The assessment of Item 1 also identified the following:

Case	Number of reports received on children in the family		Number of reports screened in and assigned for investigation/ Assessment	Number of Investigations/ assessments initiated within required timeframes	Number of assessments in which face-to-face contact with child was made within state guidelines
	Over the life of the case	During the period under review			
1	2	2	1	1	1
2	10	10	1	1	1
3	4	1	1	1	1
4	6	5	1	0	0
5	1	1	1	1	1
6	4	3	0	NA	NA
7	3	3	1	1	1
8	10	4	1	1	1
9	13	10	1	1	1
10	1	0	NA	NA	NA
11	1	0	NA	NA	NA
12	16	1	0	NA	NA

Summary of Case Review Findings: Each of the eight applicable cases had one report that was screened in and investigated or assessed. In five of the cases, the reports were responded to with a Family Assessment. In all of the cases involving Family Assessments, the agency initiated the assessments within required timeframes. In one case, the assessment was initiated on the same day the report was received; in two cases, the assessments were initiated the next calendar day; in one case, the assessment was initiated within two calendar days; and in one case, the

assessment was initiated within four calendar days. In addition, face-to-face contacts with children were made within required timeframes in all of the Family Assessments reviewed.

In three cases, the reports were handled through an investigation or traditional approach. In two of those cases, the agency initiated the investigation within 72 hours as required by statute – one on the same day as the report was received and the other the day after the report was received. In both of these cases, face-to-face contact with the children was made in the early stages of the investigation.

In the one case rated an Area Needing Improvement, the agency responded to the report with an investigation or traditional response. In that case, the investigation was initiated nine days after receipt of the report, well outside required timeframes. However, once the investigation was initiated, the agency made timely face-to-face contact with the child.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders observed that the agency provides a timely response to reports of child maltreatment that are screened in and accepted for assessment. The agency has a formal on-call system which allows for timely response outside of normal working hours, as well. Teaming of investigations routinely occurs between the agency and law enforcement, and there is a solid working relationship between those agencies. In addition, mandated reporters spoke highly of the agency's timely response to their initial phone calls. They are routinely able to make person-to-person contact with the intake worker when needed, and indicated that there has been a marked improvement in agency response to intake calls since the designation of one caseworker to cover intake responsibilities versus caseworkers rotating those responsibilities.

County Self Assessment: The Child and Family Services Assessment Unit of Clay County Social Services includes two traditional assessment/investigation workers and three Family Assessment workers. Based on the number of investigations and assessments completed in 2004, each worker completed an average of 34.8 assessments or investigations. Workers rotate assignments and, in cases of imminent risk, the report will be assigned to the worker that is able to handle it immediately. If a worker is not available as soon as needed, the agency requests that local law enforcement conduct a child welfare check to assess the safety of the child. Based upon review of a report available in the Social Services Information System (SSIS), workers were able to initiate investigations/assessments within 24 hours in 68 percent of cases. The requirement in Family Assessment cases to contact families and children within five calendar days of a report is difficult, while maintaining a "family friendly" model of engaging families.

Summary: Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Information across data sources – case review, stakeholder comments and the agency self assessment – was generally consistent. The case review reflected timely initiation of assessments and investigations in the majority of cases, and stakeholder comments echoed those findings. The agency documented in its self assessment the capacity and process for assuring timely response to reports.

Supplemental Item. Screening and assessment

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of this Supplemental Item was applicable in eight of 12 cases. This item is not included in the federal list of performance item and is not an indicator used in determining substantial conformity on any of the seven federal Child and Family Service Review Outcomes. The Screening and Assessment Supplemental Item was added to evaluate the appropriateness of child protection screening decisions and the thoroughness of child protection assessments. The amount and quality of contact by the agency with alleged victims and offenders, along with the rationale for the assessment decisions are evaluated. These areas of child protection practice are not adequately addressed in any of the 23 Child and Family Service Review performance items. The results of the assessments were the following:

- This Supplemental Item was rated a Strength in all five in-home cases and all three applicable placement cases, or 100 percent of all applicable cases.
- The Supplemental Item was not applicable in four cases.

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

The assessment of the Supplemental Item also identified the following:

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
Appropriate screening decisions were made based on criteria and legal definitions of abuse and/or neglect:	8	0	4
The agency conducted thorough assessments that addressed all allegations and maintained sufficient contact to assess risk and ensure safety of the child(ren):	8	0	4
Determinations of whether maltreatment occurred were based on a preponderance of evidence:	3	0	9
Determinations of whether child protection services were needed were based on an assessment of risk:	8	0	4

Summary of Case Review Findings: In all eight applicable cases, the decision to accept the report and assign it for a child protection assessment or investigation was in accordance with statutory screening criteria. In addition, all of the assessments/investigations reviewed were considered thorough, and appropriate determinations were made in all of the cases reviewed. Reviewers noted appropriate and consistent use of Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools, including risk and safety assessments. Reviewers also noted that making determinations of maltreatment and need for ongoing services are shared responsibilities and those decisions are discussed during team meetings.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders are familiar with the reporting process and spoke highly of the agency’s timely response to their initial phone calls. Stakeholders also appreciated the

agency's willingness to provide training to mandated reports when needed. There were mixed observations regarding the consistency of screening decisions. Internal agency personnel also acknowledged recent difficulties with consistency in screening decisions, and attributed this to worker turnover and newer staff participating in those screening team meetings. Stakeholders consistently identified struggles regarding the screening of reports that include allegations of parental substance use. There are differing opinions as to what constitutes child maltreatment in these situations. Some stakeholders called for clearer guidance from DHS on how to screen and/or address these types of reports. Overall, stakeholders expressed confidence in the skill level of assessment workers.

County Self Assessment: A screening team consisting of all assessment social workers and the intake social worker screen reports on a daily basis. Regional guidelines and statutes are used for making screening decisions. Turnover within the unit has made this process very difficult. A high percentage of child maltreatment cases are handled through Family Assessment.

At weekly staff meetings of the Intake and Assessment Unit, cases are discussed utilizing a case consultation form which identifies the type of intervention, safety and risk assessment information, services provided and timeframes for completing the assessment. Decisions for closure or referral for provision of on-going services are recommended by the assigned worker to the team, and the team then makes further recommendations or agrees with the presented options.

Summary: The Supplemental Item was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Information across data sources was generally consistent. There have been recent struggles with consistency of screening decisions. The agency is aware of this and has identified ways in which to work on improving in this area. Observations from case reviews were positive.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 2 was applicable in 11 of 12 cases reviewed. It refers to the incidence of multiple determined reports of maltreatment arising from the same general conditions or by the same perpetrator. In assessing Item 2, reviewers determined whether there had been at least one substantiated maltreatment report during the period under review, and if so, whether another substantiated report occurred within six months of that report. This item applies to Alternative Response cases in the following way: reviewers determined whether an Alternative Response assessment was conducted during the period under review that resulted in the provision of post assessment services based on a formal risk assessment with a moderate or higher level of risk; and, if so, whether another Alternative Response assessment occurred within six months of that report that also resulted in the provision of post assessment services based on a formal risk assessment with a moderate or higher level of risk. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 2 was rated a Strength in all four applicable in-home cases and all seven placement cases, or 100 percent of all applicable cases.
- Item 2 was Not Applicable in one case.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength when there were no substantiated maltreatment reports during the period under review; or there was one substantiated report, but there was not another one within a six-month period. Cases were Not Applicable when the case was not open due to a report of abuse or neglect.

The assessment of Item 2 also identified the following:

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
Over the life of the case, there was at least one determined report of maltreatment on any child in the family, or at least one report handled as Family Assessment that resulted in post-assessment services based on a formal risk assessment with a moderate or higher level of risk:	11	1	
During the period under review, there was at least one determined report of maltreatment on any child in the family, or at least one report handled as Family Assessment that resulted in post-assessment services based on a formal risk assessment with a moderate or higher level of risk:	5	7	
When there were determined reports of maltreatment during the period under review, there was another determined report within six months:	0	5	7
When there were multiple determined reports of maltreatment, the reports involved the same perpetrator or the same general circumstances:	0	0	12

Summary of Case Review Findings: There were no incidents of repeat maltreatment in any of the cases reviewed. If children and families entered the county child welfare system due to a determination of child maltreatment, or a need for post-assessment Alternative Response (AR) services, a subsequent maltreatment determination or qualifying AR assessment did not occur.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders did not provide comment on this specific issue.

County Self Assessment: Data for calendar year 2004 provided by DHS indicates that Clay County did not meet the national standard for recurrence of maltreatment. More current Social Service Information System (SSIS) data indicates that the county has met the national standard for recurrence of maltreatment. The SSIS Charting and Analysis report measuring recurrence of maltreatment shows that county recurrence rate for the time period of September 1, 2004 to August 31, 2005 was 1.2 percent. Implementation of AR/Family Assessment and the high level of case management services being provided have helped to reduce recurrence rates.

Summary: Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Information across data sources was generally consistent. The case review reflected positive practice and, while the county did not meet the national standard for recurrence of maltreatment in 2004, the county self assessment identified improvement in this area.

Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.		
Number of cases reviewed according to degree of outcome achievement:		
	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially achieved:	10	83.3%
Partially achieved:	2	16.7%
Not achieved or addressed:	0	0.0%
Not applicable:	0	--

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 2

Safety Outcome 2 evaluates the services to families that protect children in the home and prevent removal, and specific intervention efforts made by the agency to reduce or remove the risk of harm. Outcome 2 must be rated as substantially achieved in 90 percent of the cases reviewed to be in substantial conformity. With 83.3 percent of the cases reviewed rated as substantially achieved, Clay County did not achieve substantial conformity.

Item 3. Services to families to protect children in home and prevent removal

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

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

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

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

The assessment of Item 3 also identified the following:

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
For the period under review, there were determined reports of abuse or neglect, or risk of harm to the children:	12	0	
When there were determined reports or risks of harm to the children, the agency provided or arranged for services to the family to protect the child(ren) in the home before removal:	7	1	4
The agency completed a Structured Decision Making Safety Assessment:	7	0	5

Summary of Case Review Findings: In one case, the decision to remove the child from the home without providing placement prevention services was appropriate based on the immediate safety needs of the child. In the remaining cases, the agency provided multiple services to prevent placement. The services offered and provided to families covered a wide range of areas, including mental health services for adults and children, medical referrals, parenting education and chemical dependency services. In a number of cases, reviewers noted that social workers successfully advocated for children and families, and that good communication and collaboration occurred between the agency and service providers.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders observed that the agency places an emphasis on placement prevention services, and reasonable efforts standards to prevent placement are met in court. The agency has a multi-disciplinary placement prevention team which reviews potential out-of-home placements, including some juvenile corrections cases. The team reviews services that have been provided to a family and caseworker recommendations. Numerous stakeholders described their participation on that team. Some concern was expressed that decisions and recommendations from the team are inconsistent.

Stakeholders also observed that a number of children enter care as a result of a 72-hour hold made by law enforcement personnel, with mental health issues appearing to be the basis for the majority of recent holds. They commented that in the majority of cases, children continue in care following the Emergency Protective Care (EPC) hearing, but there are also a number of children who return home prior to an EPC hearing.

County Self Assessment: Clay County attempts to provide services to meet the identified needs of a family prior to placing a child or children in out-of-home care. There is a wide array of family preservation and support services available to meet the individual needs of children and their families including: various case management services, intensive in-home therapy, family skills training, community-based mental health services for children and adults, parental capacity evaluations, chemical dependency and domestic abuse services, truancy intervention within the schools, respite care, behavioral assessments and interventions, Early Childhood and Family Education, Head Start and a variety of other early intervention services.

In addition, Clay County has a pre-placement screening team to review all children who are at risk of being placed to determine whether placement is necessary, the appropriate placement setting, and services needed to ensure safety and the best interest of the child(ren).

Summary: Item 3 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Information across data sources was consistent. The self assessment and stakeholders identified that the agency provides services to prevent placement when children can be safely maintained in their homes. This was also supported by information gathered through the case review.

Item 4. Risk of harm to child

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement _____ Not Applicable

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

- Item 4 was rated a Strength in all five in-home cases and five of seven placement cases, or 83.3 percent of all applicable cases.
- Item 4 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in two applicable cases (16.7 percent).

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

The assessment of Item 4 also identified the following:

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
During the period under review, there was a risk of harm to the child(ren) that necessitated the provision of services to the family or placement of the child(ren) in foster care:	12	0	0
When there was risk of harm to the child(ren), sufficient efforts were made by the agency to reduce or remove the risk of harm through specific interventions:	10	2	0
The agency completed an initial risk assessment:	9	1	2
The initial risk level assigned was: Low - 1 case Moderate - 3 cases High - 5 cases Intensive - 0 cases			
The agency conducted risk re-assessments:	5	4	3
The most recent risk level in comparison to the initial risk level: Decreased - 3 cases Remained the same - 2 cases Increased – 0 cases			
There were indications that case decisions and planning for removal of child(ren) from the home or reunification were based on concerns about child(ren)’s health and safety:	10	1	1

Summary of Case Review Findings: Generally, once a case was opened by the agency, efforts to manage risk of harm for children were comprehensive and addressed the identified needs. A variety of assessments and services were provided to support parents and children in the home and, when necessary, out-of-home placement resources were utilized to protect children. Agency caseworkers made concerted efforts to provide services that targeted the risks that were identified and to promote parents’ capacity to care for their children, when appropriate.

In one case rated as Area Needing Improvement, the identified issue was regarding the timeliness of chemical dependency assessment and service provision. In the other case needing improvement, there was inadequate service provision and monitoring to address significant chemical use concerns of a parent.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders appreciated the serious and complex nature of the child protection cases opened by the agency. In particular, they identified an increase in the number of cases involving methamphetamine use and the difficulties such cases present. Stakeholders involved with the court system observed that the seriousness of cases being brought to court has increased and the agency, out of necessity, has become more reactive than proactive. Stakeholders also, however, identified the agency as being creative in developing services and accessing resources to meet the needs of the families they serve.

Family Assessment, especially in lower risk cases and for families with young children, was viewed as an effective approach to assist families in addressing their overall needs.

County Self Assessment: Clay County addresses child maltreatment using a Family Assessment response in a high percentage of cases. On override to an investigative approach has been made on several occasions due to identified risk factors. County staff complete Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools and utilize them in identifying family needs, strengths and safety risks. These tools assist staff in identifying appropriate services for the family and assist workers in developing a case plan with the family. Weekly staff meetings are utilized for case consultation (including seeking input on appropriate services to meet the needs of each family), support and problem-solving.

Increased methamphetamine use among youth and adults, as well as a lack of appropriate methamphetamine treatment options, has impacted the intensity of the traditional assessments and the provision of on-going services through permanency. Mental illness and chemical dependency are significant factors in child protection assessments and case management. There has also been an increase in methamphetamine related placements. Neglect, parental alcohol and drug abuse are the primary reasons for placements in Clay County.

Summary: Item 4 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Information across data sources was largely consistent.

Evaluating the Findings: Permanency

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.				
Number of cases reviewed according to degree of outcome achievement:				
	Total Number	Total Percentage		
Substantially achieved:	4	57.1%		
Partially achieved:	3	42.9%		
Not achieved or addressed:	0	0.0%		
Not applicable:	0	--		
Conformity of county data indicators with national standards:				
	National Standard	County's Percentage	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard
Foster care re-entries	8.6%	21.6%		X
Length of time to achieve reunification	76.2%	93.7%	X	
Length of time to achieve adoption	32.0%	80.0%	X	
Stability of foster care placements	86.7%	95.5%	X	

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 1

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

Clay County did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings: the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 57.1 percent of the cases reviewed and the county met three of four national standards associated with this outcome.

Item 5. Foster care re-entries

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement _____ Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 5 was applicable in three of seven placement cases reviewed. Foster care re-entries examines the child's placement history, specifically any discharges from foster care that are followed by a return to foster care for the same general reasons within 12 months. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 5 was rated a Strength in one applicable case (33.3 percent).
- Item 5 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in two applicable cases (66.7 percent).
- Item 5 was Not Applicable in four cases.

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

The assessment of Item 5 also identified the following:

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
The child entered care at least once during the period under review:	3	4	0
When a child entered care during the period under review, the entry was within 12 months of a previous discharge from care:	2	1	4
Multiple entries into care were due to the same reason:	2	0	5

Summary of Case Review Findings: In three of the cases reviewed, children entered out-of-home placement during the period under review. In one of those cases, this was the child’s sole entry into foster care.

In both cases needing improvement, the child(ren)’s most recent entry into foster care was within 12 months of a previous discharge from out-of-home care. In one case, a child re-entered care within two months of a previous discharge. In the other case, the child re-entered care within one and a half months of a previous discharge. In both cases, the multiple entries into care were related to chemical use issues of the parents and/or child.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders provided little input on this item. Some identified specific examples of the agency making thoughtful plans for transitioning a child from foster care back to their parental home. They also observed that the agency has a strong commitment to providing services to avoid unnecessary out-of-home placement.

County Self Assessment: 2004 data indicates that Clay County does not meet the national standard for foster care re-entries. However, review of data available in SSIS for the period under review (September 1, 2004 to August 31, 2005) indicates Clay County has improved from 21.6 percent to 18.3 percent.

Summary: Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Information across data sources was generally consistent. The agency did not meet the national standard for re-entry and the case review reflected examples of re-entry.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

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

- Item 6 was assigned a rating of Strength in all seven applicable cases (100 percent).

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item if, during the period under review, there were no changes in placement and the current placement was considered stable.

The assessment of Item 6 also identified the following:

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
The children remained in the same placement setting throughout the current or most recent episode of care:	4	3	
All of the placement changes during the period under review occurred for reasons directly related to helping children achieve the goals of their case plan:	3	0	4
The current or most recent placement setting was stable:	7	0	

Number of Placement Settings Children were in During the Period Under Review	Number of Cases
1	4
2	2
3	1
4	0
5 or more	0

Summary of Case Review Findings: In four cases, children remained in the same placement setting throughout the period under review. It was significant to note that each of the four children had remained in the same placement setting for extended periods of time (ranging from 19 months to over four years).

In each of the three cases where children did experience changes in placement settings, those changes were determined to be appropriate based on the goals of their case plans. In one case, the child moved from non-relative foster care to a pre-adoptive relative’s home. In the two other cases, the children’s moves were to less restrictive placement settings, determined to be appropriate to meet the needs of the children.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders indicated that foster parents have access to quality training and that the agency informs them of available training. Some indicated that foster parents receive necessary information at the time children are initially placed in their homes.

Others indicated that the amount of information that foster parents receive varies by worker. Stakeholders also commented that foster parents have access to services such as respite that aids in maintaining stability. However, stakeholders described inconsistencies in how those services were accessed, e.g. in some cases the caseworker had made arrangements, but in other cases foster parents were responsible for making their own arrangements. Foster parents were provided with emergency contact numbers in the event that they need to contact agency personnel outside of regular business hours.

County Self Assessment: At 95.5 percent, Clay County exceeds both the national standard and state average on stability of foster care placements. Foster care licensors and placing social workers provide ongoing support and training to foster homes to ensure that the needs of the child, as well as the foster parents, are being met. In addition, Therapeutic Support of Foster Care is a resource that the county utilizes to provide further training and support for foster and adoptive families to address behavioral and mental health needs of children placed in their homes.

Clay County works with the Minnesota Child Welfare Training System (MCWTS) to offer foster, adoptive and kinship training, and the county has hosted a number of trainings locally. Foster, kinship and pre-adoptive parents also receive ongoing support from both licensors and social workers regarding the specific needs of the child(ren) they are caring for. Training needs may be identified from these dialogues with foster parents/kinship caregivers.

Summary: Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Information across data sources was generally consistent and positive.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 7 was applicable in all seven placement cases reviewed. This item focuses on establishing the most appropriate permanency goal for the child. In assessing Item 7, reviewers determined whether the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 7 was rated a Strength in all seven cases (100 percent).

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength when reviewers determined that the permanency goal was appropriate and the goal was established in a timely manner.

The assessment of Item 7 also identified the following:

- Children had the following permanency goals:

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

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

	Number of Cases:
Concurrent Permanency Planning:	4
Family Group Decision Making:	2
Permanency Planning Teams:	6
Parallel Protection Process:	0
Other formal processes:	1

	Yes	No	NA
The child(ren) entered care as a result of a Child in Need of Protection or Services (CHIPS) petition (including 72 hour holds):	6	1	
A permanency progress review was held within six months for child(ren) under 8-years-old:	1	2	4
A permanency hearing was held within 12 months of the child(ren)'s entry into care (child(ren) of all ages):	3	2	2
The child(ren) entered into care as a result of a VPA not due solely to their disability	1	6	
The agency filed a CHIPS petition within 90 days of the VPA:	1	0	6
A permanency hearing was held within 14 months of the date of the voluntary placement:	0	1	6
For child(ren) with a goal of long-term foster care, other more permanent goals have been considered and ruled out:	2	1	4
For child(ren) with a goal of long-term foster care, the court made a judicial determination and documented compelling reasons why adoption or transfer of custody was not in the child(ren)'s best interest:	1	2	4
The following compelling reasons were documented in the cases reviewed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The child(ren) was at least 12-years-old and reasonable efforts to locate an adoptive home or permanent home with a relatives were not successful – no cases <input type="checkbox"/> The child(ren) has a sibling at least 12-years-old who was ordered into long-term foster care and the siblings have a significant positive relationship and were ordered into the same long-term foster care home – no cases <input type="checkbox"/> The court found other compelling reasons – one case 			
	Yes	No	

The permanency goal was appropriately matched to the child(ren)'s individual needs for permanency and stability:	7			0
	Yes	No	NA	Exception Noted
The agency filed a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) petition when children had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, or met other Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requirements:	2	0	3	2

Summary of Case Review Findings: In the one case in which reunification was the primary goal, a secondary goal of transfer of custody to a relative had been established. In the remaining six cases, three children had a goal of adoption and three had a goal of long-term foster care. All permanency goals were determined to be appropriate and consistent with the ages and needs of the children. It was specifically noted in a number of cases that the children's family had been involved in establishing the permanency goal.

It is significant to note that permanency hearings were held within required timeframes in only one of the cases reviewed. In two cases involving children under 8 years of age, the required permanency progress review was not held within six months of the children's entry into care, but permanency proceedings were commenced within 12 months as required. In two cases involving children over 8 years of age, permanency proceedings were not commenced within the required 12 month timeframe. In the one case in which the child entered care pursuant to a Voluntary Placement Agreement, the agency filed a Child in Need of Protection or Services (CHIPS) petition within 90 days as required, but the permanency hearing was not held within 14 months. And, in one case, the child had not been in care long enough to require the commencement of permanency proceedings.

Stakeholder Interviews: A number of stakeholders indicated that they are members of the agency's Permanency Planning Team. This allows stakeholder input into the establishment of an appropriate permanency goal for children. Stakeholders indicated, with one exception, that reunification is always the primary goal when children first enter out-of-home care. If and when it became apparent that reunification was no longer an option, the preferred permanency goal was adoption. Stakeholders observed that appropriate permanency goals were being established for children in out-of-home care.

County Self Assessment: Clay County has a Permanency Planning Team that reviews all permanency cases and assists the social worker in determining the permanency options for children. The Permanency Planning Team meets monthly (at four months for children under age 8, and 10 months for children age 8 and over). This team meets to review any assessments that have been completed, case status and the appropriateness of services. Additionally, recommendations may be made regarding needed services that have not been attempted. Permanency options are discussed and a permanency plan is recommended, which may include reunification. The outcome of this meeting is reported to the court and a permanency hearing is requested. All children in out-of-home care have a CHIPS Review hearing every 90 days.

Summary: Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Overall, information across data sources was consistent. The agency’s Permanency Planning Team was noted as contributing to the establishment of appropriate permanency goals.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 8 was applicable in one of seven placement cases reviewed. The reunification or transfer of legal and physical custody to a relative item focuses on achieving permanency. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the agency achieved the goal in a timely manner, or if not, whether the agency was making diligent efforts to achieve the goal. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 8 was rated a Strength in the one applicable case (100 percent).
- Item 8 was Not Applicable in six cases.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength when reviewers determined that the agency had achieved the goal in a timely manner or had taken appropriate measures to achieve the goal. Cases were Not Applicable when the permanency goal was something other than reunification or transfer of custody to relatives.

The assessment of Item 8 also identified the following:

- One child had a permanency goal of reunification.

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
The permanency goal was achieved within 12 months of the child(ren)’s most recent entry into care (within 14 months for child(ren) who initially entered care on a Voluntary Placement Agreement):	0	0	7
For children who were in care less than 12 or 14 months, steps were in place to achieve the permanency goal within this timeframe:	1	0	6

Summary of Case Review Findings: In the one case in which the primary goal was reunification (with a back-up goal of transfer of custody to a relative), the child had been in care for less than 12 months. The child had been in care for just over four months when the child ran away from the foster home to the home of a non-custodial parent, where the child was currently residing. The child’s tribe was assuming jurisdiction of this case with plans to transfer custody to the non-custodial parent with whom the child was living. While the circumstances of this case were unusual, and reunification was not likely to be with the parent from whose home the child was removed, the child remained in the home of a parent willing to assume custody.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders indicated that meeting permanency timeframes is a priority for the court and that the agency routinely meets the standard of making reasonable efforts to reunify children with their parent(s). Judges utilize scheduling orders to outline the schedule for hearings and consistently hold review hearings every 90 days as required. Stakeholders did identify some barriers to achievement of reunification within 12 months of a child’s entry into care, specifically in cases in which parental substance use was an issue. However, the court was willing to authorize allowable extensions to permanency timeframes

when appropriate. Stakeholders also identified that parental investment and a strong informal support system were key in successful, timely reunification in cases involving substance use.

County Self Assessment: Clay County provides numerous services to families to support reunification and follows permanency timelines. The county exceeds the national standard and the state average for reunification within 12 months from the time of the latest removal from the home. The high level of reunification may contribute to the 2004 statistics showing high levels of foster care re-entry.

There are barriers to timely achievement of reunification. Substance abuse/addiction and mental health conditions create a barrier for parents to provide a minimally adequate level of parenting even with home-based services in some situations. In addition, court hearings may be pushed back or continued due to overbooked court calendars. At times, defense attorneys have not had enough time with their client to prepare for court and a continuance has been granted.

The county indicated a need to more consistently utilize a reunification model and use family preservation services as a standard practice to strive toward decreasing length of placements and successful reunification into the home and community.

Summary: Item 8 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Information across data sources was generally consistent and positive.

Item 9. Adoption

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement _____ Not Applicable

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

- Item 9 was rated a Strength in two applicable cases (66.7 percent).
- Item 9 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in one applicable case (33.3 percent).
- Item 9 was Not Applicable in four cases.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item when reviewers determined that the agency had initiated the necessary steps to move the child(ren) toward adoption within 24 months of foster care placement. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that there were unnecessary delays in the adoption process and the agency's efforts to finalize the adoption within 24 months were not sufficient. Cases were Not Applicable when the permanency goal was something other than adoption.

The assessment of Item 9 also identified the following:

- In three cases children had a primary goal of adoption.

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
Adoptions were finalized within 24 months of the child(ren)'s most recent entry into care:	1	1	5
For children in care for less than 24 months, steps were in place to finalize the adoptions within the 24-month timeframe:	1	0	6

Summary of Case Review Findings: In all three applicable cases, adoption was initially a back-up permanency goal. The agency had made reasonable efforts toward reunification prior to recommending that the permanency goal be changed to adoption. In one of the cases reviewed, the child's adoption was finalized within 15 months of their initial entry into care. In another case, the child has been in out-of-home care for just over 12 months, a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) has occurred and the child has been in a pre-adoptive home for six months. There were no apparent barriers to the child's adoption being finalized within 24 months of their entry into care.

In the case needing improvement, considerable efforts were made, but the child's adoption was not finalized within 24 months of their initial entry into care. A TPR petition was filed within eight months, and a TPR was ordered within 13 months of the child's entry into foster care. Delays in finalization occurred when medical records for siblings were being sought, and the agency learned that they were required to submit a request for sibling separation. The finalization occurred 29 months after the child's entry into care.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders observed that adoption is the most preferred permanency goal when reunification is not possible or appropriate. The county has identified specific Concurrent Permanency Planning foster homes and stakeholders commented that caseworkers work very hard to place children in these homes when appropriate. Barriers to timely achievement of adoption were identified by stakeholders. They observed that adoptions have been delayed when non-custodial parents were not contacted and/or engaged in the early stages of a case. Stakeholders also identified delays at the Department of Humans Services as contributing to adoptions not being finalized in a timely manner.

County Self Assessment: Clay County exceeds both the national standard and the state average for length of time to achieve adoption. The county strives to place children in relative and concurrent homes at the initial time of placement, and has a pool of foster/adoptive homes available. Clay County also works closely with local private adoption agencies, Lutheran Social Services and Children's Home Society, regarding identifying local concurrent homes. They also list children on the State Adoption Exchange to seek adoptive homes for state wards.

Summary: Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. There were some inconsistencies across data sources. The county performed very well on, and met, the national standard for achievement of adoption. However, the case review reflected mixed performance and stakeholders identified some potential barriers to timely finalization of adoptions.

Item 10. Permanency goal of long-term foster care

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement _____ Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 10 was applicable in three of seven placement cases reviewed. The item regarding permanency goal of long-term foster care focuses on achieving permanency. In assessing this item, reviewers determined the appropriateness of the goal that rules out adoption, transfer of custody to relatives or reunification; assessed whether the child’s best interest was thoroughly considered; and assessed if efforts to attain long-term foster care were effective. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 10 was rated a Strength in one applicable case (33.3 percent).
- Item 10 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in two applicable cases (66.7 percent).
- Item 10 was Not Applicable in four cases.

Cases were rated as Strengths for this item when reviewers determined that other more permanent goals had been considered and appropriately ruled out and that the agency was assisting the child in working toward self-sufficient, independent living. Reviewers also considered the appropriateness of the permanency goal, the timeliness in achieving the goal, and the continued review of the permanency decision for ongoing appropriateness. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that other more appropriate permanency goals had not been thoroughly considered and/or there were delays in achieving the permanency goal and the agency’s efforts to attain the goal were not sufficient. Cases were Not Applicable when the permanency goal was adoption, transfer of custody to relatives or reunification.

The assessment of Item 10 also identified the following:

- Three children had a primary permanency goal of long-term foster care.

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
The goal of long-term foster care was achieved within 12 months of the child(ren)’s most recent entry into care (within 14 months for child(ren) who initially entered care on a Voluntary Placement Agreement):	0	3	4
The agency was making or had made reasonable efforts to: (1) Identify a specific long-term foster home for the child(ren); (2) Support continued placement of the child(ren) in the identified home; (3) Ensure appropriate services were provided to the child(ren); (4) Plan for the child(ren)’s independence upon leaving long-term foster care:	3	0	4
An ongoing review of the appropriateness of the long-term foster care goal has occurred:	2	0	5

Summary of Case Review Findings: In all three applicable cases, the long-term foster care goal was not achieved within timelines. In two of the cases reviewed, the goal was established and achieved outside of the period under review. In one case, reviewers documented that, although the goal was not achieved within 12 months, the agency was providing appropriate and extensive services to the family.

In one case needing improvement, the goal had been identified in the early stages of the case, but was not achieved until 15 months after the child’s entry into care. In another case needing improvement, the child had been in placement for over 13 months and a permanency petition had not yet been filed. Although already exceeding the 12-month timeframe, the agency was awaiting finalization of a TPR petition on another child in the family prior to filing the petition for long-term foster care.

Stakeholder Interviews: As referenced earlier, stakeholders observed that the court places a high priority on meeting permanency timelines. Stakeholders also identified that, while long-term foster care is the least preferable permanency option, it remains a goal that is used fairly regularly. Long-term foster care is more likely to be the permanency goal for older children with significant behavior or mental health issues. The county has not been successful at locating permanent homes for those children. Stakeholders also commented that long-term foster care is utilized when older children choose not to be adopted.

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

Summary: Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Information across data sources was generally consistent regarding situations when long-term foster care was utilized. However, while stakeholders identified that timely achievement of permanency was a priority for the system, long-term foster care was not achieved within timeframes in any of the cases reviewed.

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.		
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:		
	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially achieved:	7	100.0%
Partially achieved:	0	0.0%
Not achieved or addressed:	0	0.0%
Not applicable:	0	--

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2

Permanency Outcome 2 evaluates the proximity of foster care placement to the child’s parents; visitation among parents, child and siblings; and efforts to preserve and maintain the child’s connections to the neighborhood, community, family and friends. In order to achieve substantial conformity on Permanency Outcome 2, the outcome must be rated as substantially achieved in 90 percent of the cases reviewed. With 100 percent of the cases reviewed rated as substantially achieved, Clay County did achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2.

Item 11. Proximity of foster care

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

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

- Item 11 was rated a Strength in all five applicable cases (100 percent).
- Item 11 was Not Applicable in two cases.

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

The assessment of Item 11 also identified the following:

- In the one case in which the child was placed outside of the community, county or state of their parents’ residence, the reason for the location of the placement was clearly related to helping the child achieve their case plan goals.

	Same Community	Same County	Out of County	Out of State	NA
The proximity of child(ren)’s placement to their parents:	3	1	1	0	2

Summary of Case Review Findings: In the majority of cases, children were placed in the same county as their parents, including placements in therapeutic foster care. Reviewers noted that the foster home was easily accessible by parents and that children were able to continue in their same schools. In the one case in which the child was placed outside of the county, the child had initially been placed within the county but moved to a therapeutic foster home outside the county that had been a respite provider for the child. The location of the placement was appropriate based on the child’s needs and circumstances.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders identified that the agency attempts to place children within their home communities, but that resources are lacking in some areas of the county. There are more placement resources available within the city of Moorhead, and fewer resources in the smaller, more rural areas of the county, where children are more likely to be placed outside of their community. Children who require specialized treatment are also more likely to be placed outside of their community or the county.

County Self Assessment: Clay County currently has a solid base of approximately 33 foster homes and approximately 15 relative foster homes that provide placement services for the majority of children in out-of-home care. The county is currently working to recruit culturally appropriate homes, as well as homes that will accept older children/adolescents. In addition, the

County has a shelter care facility that is utilized for crisis beds, 29-day evaluations and consequential programming for adolescents.

Summary: Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. There were some inconsistencies across sources of information. While stakeholders identified a lack of local foster care resources, the case review reflected positive practices in placing children in close proximity to their parents and home communities. The self assessment identified some local resources for specialized treatment but also identified the need for additional recruitment of local foster care providers for specific populations.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 12 was applicable in five of seven placement cases reviewed. Placement with siblings refers to efforts made by the agency to place siblings together in foster care, or the extent to which siblings are separated because their individual needs can be met only in separate placements. In assessing Item 12 reviewers determined whether siblings were, or had been, placed together, and if not, whether separation was necessary to meet the needs of one or more of the children. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 12 was rated a Strength in all five applicable cases (100 percent).
- Item 12 was Not Applicable in two cases.

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

The assessment of Item 12 also identified the following:

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

	Placed With All Siblings Who Are in Foster Care	Placed With One or More Siblings in Foster Care	Placed Apart from all Siblings in Foster Care		NA
Location of child(ren) and their siblings who were also in foster care:	1	1	3		2
			Yes	No	NA
For siblings placed separately in foster care, there was clear evidence that separation was necessary to meet the needs of the child(ren):			3	1	3
The agency was making efforts to reunite siblings placed separately in foster care when appropriate:			2	2	3

Summary of Case Review Findings: In the majority of cases reviewed, children were placed separately from one or more of their siblings who were also in foster care. In one case, a sibling group of three was placed together in the same home. Two of those children had been adopted by the foster parents, and the other sibling was placed in the home in long-term foster care.

There were varying reasons for sibling separation in the remainder of the cases. In one case, the separation was due to the adoptive parents of one of the children being unable to take the child's sibling into their home. In the remaining cases, children were placed separately from siblings due to their specific needs.

Stakeholder Interviews: There was limited stakeholder comment regarding this item. They did observe that the agency makes efforts to place siblings together when it was in the best interest of the siblings.

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

Summary: Item 12 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Information across data sources was generally consistent.

Item 13. Visits with parents and siblings in foster care

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

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

- Item 13 was rated a Strength in all six applicable cases (100 percent).
- Item 13 was Not Applicable in one case.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item if, during the period under review, the frequency of visits between child(ren) in foster care and their mother, father and siblings was sufficient to meet the child(ren)'s needs, or if visits were not of sufficient frequency that the agency had made diligent efforts to promote visitation. Cases were Not Applicable when there were circumstances under which visitation was contrary to the child(ren)'s safety or best interest.

The assessment of Item 13 also identified the following:

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

	Weekly	Bi-weekly	Monthly	Less than Monthly	No Visits	NA
Mothers:	3	0	1	1	1	1
Fathers:	1	0	0	1	1	4
Siblings Placed Separately:	0	0	2	1	1	3

		Yes	No	NA
There were other forms of contact between children and their family members:	Mothers:	3	2	2
	Fathers:	2	1	4
	Siblings Placed Separately:	2	2	3
The arrangements for frequency of visitation was based on the individual needs of the child(ren) and family:		6	0	1

Summary of Case Review Findings: In general, agency caseworkers were thoughtful and diligent in supporting parent/child visitation. Reviewers noted flexibility in visitation plans, and visitation planning occurred with the input of a child’s therapist, and the provision of various services to support visitation. In particular, reviewers noted the provision of transportation and supervised visitation when necessary. In a number of cases, it was noted that the agency had made reasonable efforts to promote and support visitation, but parents did not follow through with visitation plans.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders identified that the frequency of visitation between parents and their children in foster care is based on the needs of the children, and that visitation is likely to be more frequent with younger children. Supervised visitation is made available through the Rainbow Bridge in Moorhead, a service utilized regularly. Most stakeholders observed that visits generally start out as supervised, and moves to unsupervised, when appropriate. The majority of them observed that the agency provides supportive services to families to facilitate visits with their children in foster care, including transportation to and from visits. Foster parents have also provided some transportation and mentoring to parents during visitation. They identified that parents not attending scheduled visits are disruptive and this traumatizes children. The agency has made attempts to avoid this disruption by waiting until parents have arrived for a visit, and then call the foster parents to bring the child(ren) in. Stakeholders appreciated these efforts, and overall, spoke highly of agency practices regarding visitation.

County Self Assessment: The county self assessment does not address this specific issue other than to indicate that supervised visitation is available when necessary.

Summary: Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Information across data sources was generally consistent and positive. The agency made efforts to support and facilitate appropriate visitation between parents and their children.

Item 14. Preserving connections

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

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

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

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item when reviewers determined that children’s primary connections had been significantly preserved while they were in foster care. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement for this item when reviewers determined that the children’s primary connections were only partially preserved or not at all preserved.

The assessment of Item 14 also identified the following:

	Significantly	Partially	Not at All
The primary connections of the child(ren) were being preserved in the foster care placement:	7	0	0

The interests of American Indian child(ren) were being addressed through:

	Yes	No	NA
Timely notification of the tribe:	3	0	4
Placement with the child(ren)’s extended family or tribe:	2	1	4

Summary of Case Review Findings: Connections to family members were most often cited as the primary connections for children in placements. Subsequently, visitation was noted as being key to preserving connections. In addition, placements with siblings and relatives were noted as important factors to preserving connections. In three of the cases reviewed, the children were American Indian, and in all three of those cases timely notification was provided to the children’s tribe. In addition, in all three cases the agency had actively sought, received and considered input from the children’s tribe regarding placement issues.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders identified that the agency made appropriate efforts to ensure that children’s primary connections were maintained. Efforts to maintain cultural connections were made by involving and engaging tribal social services in planning and decision making for children who are tribal members. They identified that these efforts have varied levels of success. Stakeholders also observed that placement in the same community, placement with relatives, and visitation are all key factors in preserving connections.

County Self Assessment: Whenever possible, Clay County utilizes relative placements, which helps in meeting the ethnic, cultural and racial needs/diversity of children in out-of-home care. The county does have some diversity within their pool of licensed homes, however, there is a need for more culturally appropriate foster homes.

All staff complete mandatory Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) training as soon as possible upon employment and ICWA manuals are available to staff. Workers ask clients if they have Native American heritage while completing their initial assessment with families. The county

uses forms available in SSIS to ensure notification of a tribe when working with Native American families. In addition, the county works with tribes to seek Native American foster/adoptive homes.

The county sees a continued need for specialized and ongoing training related to cultural diversity as well as the culture of poverty.

Summary: Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Data sources consistently identified the agency’s efforts to preserve connections as a strength of the system.

Item 15. Relative placement

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement _____ Not Applicable

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

- Item 15 was rated as a Strength in five applicable cases (83.3 percent).
- Item 15 was rated as Area Needing Improvement in one applicable case (16.7 percent).
- Item 15 was Not Applicable in one case.

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

The assessment of Item 15 also identified the following:

- Child(ren) were placed with relatives in one of the cases reviewed.

		Yes	No	NA
For children not placed with relatives, both maternal and paternal relatives were identified and considered for placement:	Maternal:	5	0	2
	Paternal:	3	1	3
For children not placed with relatives, the agency made ongoing efforts to identify and assess relatives as placement resources:		5	0	2

Summary of Case Review Findings: In general, the agency made efforts to place children with relatives when possible and appropriate. In one of the cases reviewed, the child was placed with a relative and the relative is the permanency resource. In two cases, placement with relatives had initially occurred but the relatives were unable to meet the needs of the children and a move to a non-relative home was required. Identification and assessment of maternal and paternal relatives were noted in the majority of cases. In one case, it was noted that Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) was used as a way of identifying potential relative placement options.

In the one case rated as needing improvement, the agency had identified and considered maternal, but not paternal, relatives of the child.

Stakeholder Interviews: There were varying stakeholder observations regarding agency relative search practices. Some identified that, for the most part, the agency does a good job of identifying and evaluating relatives as potential placement options. They, however, identified that more consistency is needed in relative search practices. One example provided by stakeholders was that when children are placed in concurrent planning foster homes the agency may not conduct as extensive a search as they would otherwise. In addition, they commented that the agency is not always mindful that non-custodial parents should be the first consideration when children are removed from their custodial parents' home.

Stakeholders also observed that when children are placed with relatives, there can be improved outcomes in other areas such as visitation, preservation of connections and maintaining the parent/child relationship.

County Self Assessment: Whenever possible the county utilizes relative placements. Clay County has a relative search protocol that they utilize, along with the FGDM process, to help them in identifying relatives and individuals with significant relationships to children in out-of-home care as potential placement options. If a relative is identified, the county completes an emergency relative license and then a foster care license with the family to ensure that their home is safe and appropriate to meet the needs of children.

Summary: Item 15 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. The case record review and stakeholder comments indicated a need for more consistency in agency relative search practices.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 16 was applicable in six of seven placement cases reviewed. This item focuses on the nature of the parent/child relationship and agency efforts to support a positive relationship during the period under review. In assessing this item, the reviewers determined whether the agency had made diligent efforts to promote and/or maintain the bond between the child(ren) and both parents through visitation and provision of services. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 16 was rated a Strength in all six applicable cases (100 percent).
- Item 16 was Not Applicable in one case.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength when reviewers determined that the agency had provided services designed to promote and/or maintain bonding between parents and their children. Cases were Not Applicable when a relationship with a parent was contrary to the child(ren)'s safety or best interests.

The assessment of Item 16 also identified the following:

		Number of cases:		
		Yes	No	NA
There was evidence of a strong, emotionally supportive relationship between children in foster care and their parents:	Mothers:	3	2	2
	Fathers:	2	1	4
Where appropriate, the agency made efforts to promote or maintain a strong, emotionally supportive relationship between child(ren) in foster care and their parents:	Mothers:	6	0	1
	Fathers:	3	0	4
Visits and other contact between child(ren) and their parents were planned and carried out in a manner that supported the parent/child relationship:	Mothers:	5	1	1
	Fathers:	2	1	4

Summary of Case Review Findings: The agency supported and promoted the parent/child relationship. Agency efforts to facilitate and support visitation between children and their parents was a key issue in rating this item. Placement with extended family and placing children in close proximity to their parental home were also noted as contributing to maintaining relationships between children and their parents.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders reported that caseworkers are supportive of children placed in foster care and their parents, and promote the child/parent relationship. Stakeholders cited examples of children building relationships with non-custodial parents, usually fathers, in cases where relationships have been almost non-existent prior to placement.

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

Summary: Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. The information across data sources was consistent and positive regarding agency practices to build and support the parent/child relationship.

Evaluating the Findings: Well-Being

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.		
Number of cases reviewed according to degree of outcome achievement:		
	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially achieved:	5	41.7%
Partially achieved:	7	58.3%
Not achieved or addressed:	0	0.0%
Not applicable:	0	--

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1

Well-being Outcome 1 evaluates whether an assessment of needs is made for the children, parents and foster families, and the agency’s response in meeting those needs. It assesses the level of involvement of the children and parents in case planning and the frequency of contact with the social worker. To achieve substantial conformity on Well-being Outcome 1, the outcome must be rated as substantially achieved in 90 percent of the cases reviewed. With 41.7 percent of the cases reviewed rated as substantially achieved, Clay County did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-being Outcome 1.

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

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement _____ Not Applicable

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

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

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

The assessment of Item 17 also identified the following:

		Number of cases:		
		Yes	No	NA
The needs of children, parents and foster parents related to safety, permanency and well-being were adequately assessed and identified:	Children:	11	1	
	Assessment of independent living skills for children over age 16:	2	0	10
	Mothers:	9	2	1
	Fathers:	6	3	3
	Foster parents:	4	1	7
The identified needs of children, parents and foster parents were addressed through appropriate services:	Children:	12	0	0
	Provision of independent living services for children over age 16:	2	0	10
	Mothers:	9	2	1
	Fathers:	5	4	3
	Foster parents:	4	1	7

Summary of Case Review Findings: The assessment of needs and provision of services was more consistent and thorough in placement cases than in-home cases. In a number of cases, reviewers noted the use of formalized tools to assess the needs of family members, e.g. Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools and the Child Well-being Tool. In addition, formal assessments were completed outside of the agency and informal assessments occurred during caseworker contacts with families. Multiple services were provided to meet identified needs and case-related interviews conducted with family members reflected a high level of satisfaction with the services provided.

Various issues were identified in the cases rated as Areas Needing Improvement. In three cases, non-custodial fathers' needs were not adequately assessed, and subsequently, appropriate services were not provided. In other cases, underlying issues were not identified, foster parents' needs were not adequately assessed, and recommended services were either not provided or not provided in a timely manner.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders observed that many of the families served through child protection programs have multiple and intense needs. Overall, they indicated that there is an adequate array of services available to meet the needs of families. Stakeholders cited many examples of "teaming" and collaborative meetings that are held that aid in the assessment of needs and identification of appropriate services. The agency is described as being creative in meeting the needs of families. The homeless and truancy programs are cited as examples of programs the agency developed in response to identified community needs.

Stakeholders did identify some specific gaps in locally available services. Reportedly, there are waiting lists of up to three months for access to adult mental health services, and acceptance of Medical Assistance as payment is also noted as an issue. Gaps in the area of chemical dependency treatment were also noted. One stakeholder commented that efforts with low functioning mothers are lacking, and additional attention to those parents is warranted.

County Self Assessment: County resources, policies and practices related to this item are described in other items. In general, the agency provides access to many formal assessments, including parental capacity and mental health assessments. A broad array of services is available to children and families served by the agency.

Summary: Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. This item is particularly critical to case practice and overall achievement of positive outcomes for children and families. Performance on this item was based on a number of complex and interrelated factors. The rating for Item 17 involved considering significant amounts of information from case reviews and case related interviews. The information across data sources was largely consistent. Typically, families involved with agency child protection had multiple needs and required a range of assessment and follow-up services.

Item: 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement _____ Not Applicable

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

- Item 18 was rated a Strength in two of five in-home and five of seven placement cases, or 58.3 percent of all applicable cases.
- Item 18 was rated as Area Needing Improvement in five applicable cases (41.7 percent).

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item when reviewers determined that all relevant parties had actively participated in the case planning process. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that one or more of the key parties had not been involved in the case planning process and/or a case plan was not completed.

The assessment of Item 18 also identified the following:

	Number of cases:			
	Yes	No	NA	
The agency made extensive efforts to involve the parents and child(ren) in case planning activities:	Children:	4	2	6
	Mothers:	10	1	1
	Fathers:	5	4	3
The input of the parents and child(ren) was actively considered in the development of the case plan:	10	2	0	
In placement cases, procedural safeguards were in place with respect to parental rights pertaining to the removal of child(ren) from the home, changes in placements and visiting privileges:	9	0	3	
A current/written case plan was in the file:	12	0	0	
For child(ren) age 16 and older in foster care, an Independent Living Skills plan was in the file:	2	0	10	

Summary of Case Review Findings: There were up-to-date case plans in each of the cases reviewed. In some cases there were excellent examples of caseworkers fully engaging applicable family members in the development of the plan. In two cases, reviewers specifically noted that FGDM was utilized to aid in the development of the plan. In applicable cases, reviewers noted that the agency had sought tribal involvement in case planning activities.

Cases were rated as Areas Needing Improvement due to a lack of one or more applicable family members being included in the case planning process. In two cases, children were old enough to contribute to case planning and were not engaged; in one case, the mother was not involved in the case planning process; and in four cases, fathers were not engaged in case planning.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholder observations were mixed on this item. The majority of them commented that the agency makes concerted efforts to include children and families in case planning. Stakeholders observed that plans are frequently developed using a team process and FGDM is specifically cited as being instrumental in engaging families in the case planning process. In contrast, a few stakeholders observed that family involvement in the development of a case plan is minimal. They also observed that engagement of foster parents in the case planning process varies by worker, and the majority of the time foster parents are provided with a copy of the out-of-home placement plan.

A number of stakeholders referenced the county's settlement conference process. Cases involving out-of-home placement are discussed at a settlement conference prior to an admit/deny hearing. This provides families and others the opportunity to have input into case plans and results in the resolution of a high number of cases.

County Self Assessment: The agency expects that social workers will actively involve families in all case planning and families will sign the agreed-upon plan, or note any disagreement. The county uses FGDM, the relative search process and wraparound to assist in case planning. At times families are unwilling to participate in case planning, which results in workers developing the case plan without their input. In addition, working with non-adjudicated fathers on a case plan has been an issue as it relates to permanency. If social services has not made reasonable efforts with fathers, permanency can be delayed. Clay County is looking at developing a best practice of providing a case plan to both parents, whether they are adjudicated or not.

County social workers complete the Independent Living Plan as part of the out-of-home placement plan for children in foster care, and complete the plan with the youth to identify individual needs/services to obtain independent living skills necessary to successfully transition out of foster care.

Summary: Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Information across data sources was generally consistent. Varied levels of family involvement in the case planning process were noted in the case review and cited by stakeholders. The self assessment identified agency expectations of family members being involved in case planning, but also identified examples of when this did not occur.

Item 19. Worker visits with child

X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

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

- Item 19 was rated a Strength in all five in-home and all seven placement cases, or 100 percent of all applicable cases.

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

The assessment of Item 19 also identified the following:

	Number of cases:			
	Weekly	Bi-weekly	Monthly	Less than Monthly
The most typical pattern of visitation between the caseworker and the children during the period under review:	1	1	9	1

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

Summary of Case Review Findings: The review of this item reflected positive practice in all of the cases. The frequency of caseworker contact with children was consistent with the children’s needs and the visits were focused on pertinent issues in all cases. In a number of cases, reviewers noted that the frequency of visits increased or decreased based on the changing needs of the children, with visits occurring as frequently as weekly, when needed. In addition, reviewers noted that caseworkers spent individual time with children as well as visiting with them in conjunction with other family members. In the one case where visits were occurring less than monthly, it was determined to be in accordance with the needs of the child.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholder comments on this item were mainly focused on caseworker’s visits with children in placement. In these cases, workers see children regularly (usually monthly). Visits occur in a variety of settings including, the foster home, at school and in the office. Contacts are sometimes initiated by the children. Overall, stakeholders provided positive comments regarding the frequency and substance of caseworker visits with children, and indicated that caseworkers are knowledgeable about the needs of children in their caseloads.

County Self Assessment: Contact with children is an Area Needing Improvement. It is expected that caseworkers see each family that they provide services to a minimum of once per month, along with more frequent contact for families with high risk levels. However, reports reviewed in SSIS indicate that monthly contact is not occurring on a consistent basis. The county recognizes that social workers who spend more time with children and parents have a better chance of successful service provision. The high intensity case loads, high number of collateral contacts and documenting responsibilities contribute to decreased time with clients. SSIS documentation is reportedly as high as 55-60 percent of social worker time.

Summary: Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Performance on this item is closely associated with positive outcomes across all domains of Safety, Permanency and Well-being. Caseworkers' first-hand observations and ongoing informal assessments, conducted through contacts with children, are critical to managing risk to the children and to case planning. There were some inconsistencies across sources of information. While the case review reflected very strong practice in this area, the self assessment indicated a need for improved practice and identified barriers to frequent contact. Stakeholder comments were generally positive.

Agency policy is for caseworkers to visit children quarterly when in out-of-home placement outside of the county. The agency is encouraged to reevaluate that policy, and make determinations on the frequency of visits directly with the caseworker based on the needs of the child, and not on the location of the child's placement.

Item 20. Worker visits with parents

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement _____ Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 20 was applicable in all 12 cases reviewed. Worker visits with parents refers to the typical patterns of face-to-face contact between the caseworkers and the parents, whether the frequency of visits is consistent with the needs of the children, and if visits focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery and goal attainment. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the caseworker had sufficient face-to-face contact, with both the mothers and fathers of the children, to attain the children's permanency goal and ensure their safety and well-being. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 20 was rated a Strength in three of five in-home and six of seven placement cases, or 75 percent of all applicable cases.
- Item 20 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in three cases (25 percent).

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item when reviewers determined that visits with parents were sufficient to address the parents' needs and that visits focused on issues pertaining to case planning, service delivery and goal attainment. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the frequency of contact between the worker and parents was insufficient to ensure the child's safety and well-being, or to track the progress of the case toward the permanency goal.

The assessment of Item 20 also identified the following:

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

	Number of cases:				
	Weekly	Bi-weekly	Monthly	Less than monthly	NA
Mothers:	0	1	8	2	1
Fathers:	0	0	4	5	3

		Number of cases:		
		Yes	No	NA
The frequency of visits was consistent with the needs of the children:	Mothers:	11	0	1
	Fathers:	5	4	3
The visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery and goal attainment:	Mothers:	11	0	1
	Fathers:	7	2	3

Summary of Case Review Findings: Agency performance for this item was mixed. In all of the cases reviewed, agency workers had contact with mothers at a frequency that was consistent with the needs of the children, and visits were focused on pertinent issues. As noted in Item 19, the frequency of visits with parent(s) was also adjusted over time as needs and risks changed. Parents who participated in case-related interviews provided many positive comments regarding relationships that had been developed with their caseworkers.

In all cases rated as Areas Needing Improvement, the issue identified was inconsistent contact, or lack of contact with fathers.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders commented that most agency caseworkers seem well informed about important issues and dynamics that occur in their cases.

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

Summary: Item 20 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Limited stakeholder input was available and case practice was generally consistent with the information described in the county self assessment.

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.		
Number of cases reviewed according to degree of outcome achievement:		
	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially achieved:	8	100%
Partially achieved:	0	0%
Not achieved or addressed:	0	0%
Not applicable:	4	--

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 2

Well-being Outcome 2 evaluates whether an assessment of educational needs is made for the children, and the agency’s response in meeting those needs. In order to achieve substantial conformity on Well-being Outcome 2, the outcome must be rated substantially achieved in 90 percent of the cases reviewed. With 100 percent of the cases reviewed rated as substantially achieved, Clay County did achieve substantial conformity with Well-being Outcome 2.

Item 21. Educational needs of the child

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

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

- Item 21 was rated a Strength in three in-home cases and five placement cases, or 100 percent of all applicable cases.
- Item 21 was Not Applicable in four cases.

Cases were rated a Strength when reviewers determined that the agency was actively involved in assessing the child(ren)’s educational needs, advocating for services to meet educational needs and/or referring the child(ren) for services to meet their needs. Cases were Not Applicable when the child(ren) was too young to be enrolled in school, or for in-home service cases in which the child did not have education related issues.

The assessment of Item 21 also identified the following:

- In one in-home case, it was determined that the educational needs of the child(ren) were relevant to the reason why the agency was involved with the family, and it was a reasonable expectation that the agency address educational issues.
- In none of the four applicable foster care cases was a children enrolled in multiple schools as a result of being placed in foster care.

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

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
Special education classes:	2	0	10
Services for identified educational needs:	2	0	10
Early intervention for preschool children:	2	1	9
Inclusion of school records in the case file:	4	0	8
Advocacy with the education/school system:	5	0	7
Attention to education in case planning:	5	0	7
Providing education records to foster parents:	4	0	8

Summary of Case Review Findings: Children received educational services consistent with their identified needs. There were several examples of advocacy, and strong coordination between agency caseworkers and school personnel resulting in a cooperative effort to promote improved educational outcomes. Reviewers noted examples of agency caseworkers making referrals for needed educational services and caseworker participation in educational meetings for children.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholder observations regarding meeting educational needs of children were positive. They indicated that caseworkers are involved and accessible to education professionals. In addition, stakeholders positively noted that caseworker referrals to early education services, e.g. Head Start, have been increasing over the past two years. Stakeholders also observed that caseworkers attend educational meetings for children, and foster parents were also invited to attend when agreed to by the children’s parent(s).

County Self Assessment: Clay County has five school districts within its boundaries. Social workers are active participants in Individual Education Plan and Individual Interagency Intervention Plan meetings for educational planning to determine needs and identify services for children and families. Social workers advocate for children and families who have special educational needs. Educational providers are invited to attend and participate in wraparound meetings as well as residential review team meetings. Clay County has three FTE’s who primarily work closely with the schools regarding truancy, educational neglect and early intervention.

Summary: Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Meeting the educational needs of children was identified as a Strength across all data sources. Case reviews reflected positive practice; stakeholders identified collaborative efforts to meet educational needs; and the self assessment outlined ways in which the agency works to ensure that the educational needs of child(ren) are met.

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.		
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:		
	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially achieved:	10	83.3%
Partially achieved:	1	8.3%
Not achieved or addressed:	1	8.3%
Not applicable:	0	--

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 3

Well-being Outcome 3 evaluates whether an assessment of physical and mental health needs is made for the children, and the agency’s response in meeting those needs. In order to achieve substantial conformity on Well-being Outcome 3, the outcome must be rated as substantially achieved in 90 percent of the cases reviewed. With 83.3 percent of the cases reviewed rated as substantially achieved, Clay County did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-being Outcome 3.

Item 22. Physical health of the child

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement Not Applicable

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

- Item 22 was rated a Strength in both applicable in-home cases and all seven placement cases, or 100 percent of all applicable cases.
- Item 22 was Not Applicable in three cases.

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

The assessment of Item 22 also identified the following:

- In two in-home cases, it was determined that the health needs of the children were relevant to the reason the agency was involved with the family and that it was a reasonable expectation that the agency address health issues.

- In all three applicable foster care cases, the children received an initial health screening upon their most recent entry into care, or the agency assured that a health examination was completed within 12 months prior to the children’s placement.
- In all three applicable foster care cases, the initial health screening was provided within 30 days of the child’s most recent entry into care.

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

	Number of Cases:			
	Significantly	Partially	Not at All	NA
Preventive health care:	9	0	0	3
Preventive dental care:	4	0	0	8
Immunizations:	7	0	0	5
Treatment for identified health needs:	5	0	0	7
Treatment for identified dental needs:	3	0	0	9
Providing health records to foster parents:	4	2	0	6

Summary of Case Review Findings: In all cases reviewed, the medical and dental health needs of children were assessed and services were provided to meet identified needs. In some cases, physical health issues were key, and reviewers noted that caseworkers provided excellent advocacy for children. In addition, referrals to, and involvement of, public health was noted in a number of cases. In one foster care case, it was specifically noted that the child received a physical health examination within 24 hours of entry into foster care.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders described a strong, collaborative working relationship between the agency and the local public health agency. Stakeholders specifically identified that public health nurses have been included in wraparound services, making home visits (both when children remain in the home and after placement) and accompanying caseworkers on child welfare check visits. Stakeholders also observed that caseworkers work collaboratively with foster parents to meet the physical health needs of children. Depending upon the case situation, foster parents may take a lead role in meeting these needs. Stakeholders indicated that there are occasionally issues with Medical Assistance and foster parents pay for physical health services out of their own pocket.

County Self Assessment: Children in out-of-home care have a medical exam as soon as possible, but always within 30 days of placement, and child well-being check-ups (early and periodic screening, diagnosis and treatment evaluations) are completed annually. Child Well-being Tools are also completed. Dental access for children in out-of-home care or who are on Medical Assistance is a concern due to long waiting lists for service.

Summary: Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Information across data sources was generally consistent. The collaborative working relationship between the social services and public health agencies contributed to consistently meeting the physical health needs of children. The expenses associated with meeting the physical health needs of children in foster care are not the responsibility of foster parents. The agency may wish to further evaluate those situations in

which foster parents have assumed out-of-pocket expenses for physical health services to ensure there are no systemic barriers to accessing these services.

Item 23. Mental health of the child

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement _____ Not Applicable

Case Review Findings: The assessment of Item 23 was applicable in 10 of 12 cases reviewed. This item focuses on the agency’s efforts to assess and meet the mental health needs of children in foster care. It applies to children receiving in-home services when mental health needs were relevant to the reason the agency was involved with the family, and the need to address mental health issues was a reasonable expectation. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether children’s mental health needs had been appropriately assessed, and the services designed to meet those needs had been, or were being, provided. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 23 was rated a Strength in four of five in-home cases and four of five placement cases, or 80 percent of all applicable cases.
- Item 23 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in two applicable cases (20 percent).
- Item 23 was Not Applicable in two cases.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength when reviewers determined that mental health needs had been significantly assessed and the identified needs for services were significantly met. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that assessments and services were provided only partially or not at all. Cases were Not Applicable in placement cases when the child was too young for an assessment of mental health needs, and for in-home cases when the children’s mental health needs were not an issue.

The assessment of Item 23 also identified the following:

	Number of Cases:		
	Yes	No	NA
A Children’s Mental Health Screening Tool was completed:	3	1	8
The screening tool was completed within recommended timeframes:	3	0	9

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

	Significantly	Partially	Not at All	NA
Formal diagnostic assessment:	7	1	1	3
Ongoing treatment for identified needs:	6	1	1	3

Summary of Case Review Findings: In the majority of cases reviewed, children’s mental health screenings were completed when required, and needed follow-up services were provided. Numerous examples of multiple mental health services being provided to children were noted. Services ranged from diagnostic assessments and psychological evaluations to outpatient therapy, day treatment services, Rule 79 Case Management and psychiatric services.

In one case noted as needing improvement, the required children’s mental health screening was not completed. In the other case, the screening had been completed and there was an indication of need for further evaluation, but that had not occurred. The parents had initially refused further

evaluation, but were expecting additional information from the caseworker that they did not receive.

Stakeholder Interviews: Stakeholders identified that there are various mental health services available for children in the community with some specific gaps, especially for young children. They indicated that there is a need for additional therapists skilled in working with very young children, as well as a need for more child psychiatric services. It was also observed that there is good coordination that occurs between child protection caseworkers and children's mental health (Rule 79) case managers.

County Self Assessment: A mental health screening tool and child Well-being Tool is completed on all children receiving child welfare or child protection services. Mental health services are coordinated by the social worker per the needs of children as identified by the screening tools.

Summary: Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. There were some minor inconsistencies across sources of information. Stakeholders identified gaps that were not evident in the cases reviewed, and the self assessment indicated a policy that wasn't consistently observed across all cases reviewed.

SYSTEMIC FACTORS

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

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

Case Review System: One of the components of the case review system involves the role of the court in reviewing cases. The agency participates on the multi-disciplinary Children's Justice Initiative (CJI) team. This team has been instrumental in focusing efforts to achieve timely permanency for children. Stakeholders identified that Child in Need of Protection or Services (CHIPS) cases take precedence in court. The county follows a one judge/one family model and judges are consistent in their rulings on CHIPS matters. Through the CJI team, the county has established guidelines for children's attendance at court hearings and also developed a best practice manual that includes best practice for review hearings.

Staff and Provider Training: Clay County actively participates in the Minnesota Child Welfare Training System (MCWTS) by sending new caseworkers to CORE training, encouraging staff to attend specialized training and hosting Foster, Adoptive and Kinship (FAK) training. The agency places a high value on staff training and provides each worker with an annual training budget for expenses related to non-mandatory training. Unfortunately, at the time of the review, due to high placement costs, a hold had been placed on non-mandatory training until the end of the calendar year. This is reportedly not a regular occurrence.

Service Array and Resource Development: There is a broad range of services for children and families available in the county. The agency has made a concerted effort to develop services to meet the identified needs of the community, and stakeholders were quick to commend the agency for this. While the agency and stakeholders did identify some specific gaps in services, there is a good array of services available that are focused on placement prevention and establishing permanency for children.

Agency Responsiveness to the Community: Clay County Social Services is viewed by its community partners as being an open and collaborative agency. The county self assessment outlined many ways in which the agency makes concerted efforts to include and seek input from community partners, and interviews conducted with stakeholders confirmed those efforts. Many stakeholders indicated that there have been improvements in collaboration over the past two years. The collaboration that occurs contributes to a shared sense of responsibility for child safety and well-being.

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

Case Review System: While stakeholders identified that the court places a high priority on meeting permanency timelines, there were some issues identified through the case review process. As described in Item 7, permanency hearings were held within required timeframes in only one of the cases reviewed. The agency is encouraged to work with their Children's Justice Initiative team to identify barriers to timely permanency hearings and develop strategies for addressing this issue.

Agency Responsiveness to the Community: The self assessment and stakeholders identified that the county's Child Protection Team is struggling to define its role and purpose. The agency has taken some initial steps to rejuvenate and assist the team. Continuation of such efforts is warranted.

Quality Assurance System: The county self assessment describes several agency quality assurance protocols for supervisors. This included supervisor review and sign-off on all child protection and child welfare plans, review of plans for case closure, and review of SDM Safety Assessment tools. In addition, supervisors convene regularly-scheduled unit meetings and consult individually with staff on an as needed basis.

The agency has experienced significant turnover over the past one and a half years. There have been changes in administration as well as front-line staff. Such changes have resulted in increased demands on supervisor and experienced staff member's time and expertise. The administration has been challenged to provide information and guidance regarding agency policies to ensure consistent practice among workers.

It's recommended that agency administration reassess their quality assurance needs and identify effective quality assurance protocols that will promote more consistent practice and improved results. The agency will benefit from the implementation of a formal qualitative case review system using a standardized process and tool which incorporates individual, scheduled consultation time with caseworkers.