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DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES
CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

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**Union County Department of Social Services
Child Welfare Program Evaluation Report
December 2016**

Background and Purpose

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services has the responsibility under General Statute 108A-74, to evaluate and provide technical assistance to county departments of social services to assure child welfare programs are in compliance with state laws, rules, and policies. The evaluation entails a review of program protocols and practices, which can include a review of case records and data sources, to determine the program's level of functioning and risk.

Focus of the Program Evaluation

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services (NCDSS), in partnership with Union County Department of Social Services (UDSS), conducted a program evaluation of the child welfare program in Union county. The focus of the evaluation was on the delivery of Foster Care Services provided by the UCDSS. In preparation for the evaluation, potential program risks were identified by UCDSS and NCDSS regarding barriers to timely permanence for children in custody in Union County. The evaluation included an examination of multiple case records for service delivery to focus on Foster Care. The reviewed cases were selected to provide insight into these potential program risks. Since the sample selected was targeted, the review data is not necessarily reflective of the overall child welfare program.

This report provides an assessment of areas to which Union County must apply resources to address and guidance on how these areas can be addressed. The Union County Program Development Plan will be revised to incorporate these findings to enhance services to children and families.

Program Evaluation

On November 29 through December 2, 2016, the program monitoring team, consisting of two NCDSS staff as well as five county staff provided an on-site review of cases, primarily focusing on the Foster Care program. The cases selected included Foster Care cases that were opened at least one day between October 2013 and September 2016. The cases reviewed included a sample of 23 Foster Cases (closed and open).

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The review team focused on the required procedures and best practices in child welfare using standardized review tools.

Key Observations/ Findings and Recommendations

This report outlines four key findings/observations and recommendations identified during the program evaluation within the Foster Care Program Area:

- I. Child and Family Team Meetings
- II. Shared parents
- III. Supervision

I. Findings/Observations: Child and Family Team Meetings (CFT's)

NCDSS policy states a Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTs) shall be used to assist the family in developing a plan to address safety concerns and develop the Out of Home Family Services Agreement, or update it if circumstances warrant changes. A CFT consists of family members and their community supports that come together to create, implement, and update a plan with the youth and family.

CFTs are required to be held at the following intervals after a child comes into custody: 1) within 30 days; 2) Within 60 days; 3) within 90 days after the 60-day meeting, not more than 150 days after coming into care; 4) every 6 months thereafter throughout the life of the case; 5) when there is a change in the plan of family circumstance and it is necessary to reconvene the team to discuss progress; and 6) CFTs continue to be required after reunification is no longer the goal.

NCDSS policy states that documentation of CFTs Meetings shall be completed on the Child and Family Team Meeting Documentation Instrument, preparation is vital to the success of the meeting, and a facilitator, who is neither the social worker for the family nor the supervisor of that social worker, shall be used in all cases with a current risk rating of high.

The results of the record review showed:

CFT's held prior to custody	45.5%
Initial CFT held within 30 days	53.3%
CFT's held according to policy- Ongoing	36.8%
Documentation of Preparing Family for CFT's	54.5%
CFT Documentation Instruments used	22.7%
Facilitator used according to policy -Initial	33.3%
Facilitator used according to policy- On-going	21.1%
Child involved in CFT's (when appropriate)	15.4%
CFT held when there was a change in plan or family circumstance	16.7%

Recommendations: Child and Family Team Meetings

- UCDSS develop, implement, and sustain agency strategies for ensuring that Child and Family Team Meetings are conducted according to policy, including: holding a CFT prior to custody, documentation on state tool, families/children being prepared for the CFT, facilitators being used when required (high risk rating).

II. Finding/Observations: Shared Parenting

NCDSS policy states a social worker should facilitate an initial shared parenting meeting as soon as possible but no later than 7 days after a child's placement out of the home to ensure that the partnership has a strong beginning and is supported by the DSS. The purpose of shared parenting is to ensure that the child's needs of nurturance and safety are met by partnering between birth parents, foster parents and the child's social worker. It may begin as a meeting but evolves into a true partnership relationship that becomes a continued experience.

The results of the Program Evaluation showed:

- Shared Parenting between parent and placement resource occurred within seven (7) days of custody (initial) 8.7% of the time.
- Ongoing Shared Parenting activities between the parent and placement occurred 23.8% of the time.

Recommendations: Shared Parenting

- UCDSS develop a process to ensure shared parenting takes place continue according to policy throughout the duration of the child's placement in foster care.

III. Finding/Observations: Supervisory Oversight

NCDSS policy states that the social worker and the supervisor shall staff the case frequently enough to ensure the safety of all victim children. Issues to be discussed include but are not limited to, risk, safety, family strengths and needs, and the family's progress. Best practice involves the supervisor and social worker conducting supervisory conferences at least every two weeks throughout the life of the child welfare case and this supervision is documented in the case record.

Of the 23 Foster Care Cases reviewed, it was found that:

- There was documented supervision in 45.5% of the cases reviewed.
- Comments derived from the review tool indicates that documentation and narratives were insufficient to describe the ongoing work of the cases reviewed.

Recommendations: Supervisory Oversight

- County develop and implement an agency strategy to ensure structured supervision time is provided to social workers and documented in the official case record.
- County develop a means of ensuring that supervisors monitor completion of all required case management activities to include thoroughness and evaluation of risk and safety factors, as well as documentation of supervisory instruction/guidance.

Program Development Plan (PDP)

A prior one-day data evaluation resulted in the development of a Program Development Plan (PDP) which was subsequently approved by NCDSS. Previously identified areas of the PDP included Reunification for Foster Children in 12 Months, Data Management and Responsible Individuals List as areas for program development. During this program evaluation, a review of the current PDP was held. The attached PDP update includes documentation of progress, challenges, relevant state data, and recommendations about the specific goals and strategies outlined in the pre-existing plan. Any new strategies to address observations/findings from the Program Evaluation will be added to existing goals.

Additional Information

The leadership of UCDSS was actively engaged in the evaluation process and interested in continuous quality improvement and increasing the safety, permanence, and well-being of children they serve. The agency embraced this program evaluation process as a learning opportunity. The agency is interested in more oversight and technical assistance from NCDSS in order to improve their outcomes for children and families.

Several strengths were noted during the program evaluation:

- There was on ongoing face-to-face contact with the foster child 100% of the time.
- Native American Heritage was assessed 100% of the time.
- The Court made findings that the agency made reasonable efforts to finalize permanent plan yearly 100% of the time.
- A permanency planning hearing was held within 12 months of custody 100% of the time.
- If a child was in custody more than one year, Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requirements were met in 100% of applicable cases.
- There was follow up when relatives expressed an interest in being involved with the foster child 100% of the time.
- The initial and on-going Permanency Planning Action Team meetings were held as required by policy 100% of the time.
- The initial placement allowed the child to engage in normal childhood activities 100% of the time.
- The initial placement allowed the child to maintain therapeutic contacts 100% of the time.
- Criminal Checks were completed on everyone 16 years old or older in the Kinship Care home 100% of the time. Court reports were submitted for each hearing 95.5% of the time.
- Contact was made with the placement resource within seven (7) days 95.5% of the time.
- A dispositional hearing was held within 30 days of the adjudication 95% of the time.
- A home visit was made to the kinship care home prior to placement in 13 of the 14 applicable cases.
- Placement log was updated 93.3% of the time.
- Yearly pictures taken and in the file of the child in agency custody occurred 93.3% of the time.

Subsequent Steps

The Union County DSS will revise their current Program Development Plan (PDP) and submit it to NCDSS to address the findings and recommendations identified during the program evaluation within 30 days of receipt of this report. It is important to remember during plan development that the goal of this process is not to add more activities to your current practice, but to examine how existing activities can be changed to be more efficient. The plan will be reviewed by NCDSS and a final version agreed upon, which will be the centerpiece of work with the Children's Program Representative and other NCDSS staff.

The NCDSS point of contact for Union County DSS is Program Monitor, Dee Hunt. Ms. Hunt, in conjunction with your Children's Program Representative (CPR), Bob Cochran will assist in the development of the program development plan and provide or arrange any technical assistance needed by your agency to implement the plan. Please submit the plan to Dee Hunt at dee.hunt@dhhs.nc.gov and Bob Cochran at robert.cochran@dhhs.nc.gov.

Once the plan is implemented, NCDSS will provide oversight and technical assistance as outlined in the program development plan. The plan will be reviewed every six months with the Program Monitor, to include a review of data in addition to the program development plan.

The NCDSS appreciates Union County DSS's commitment to improving outcomes for children and families and looks forward to our work together in continuous quality improvement.