
APPENDIX E

Methodology

Summary of Methodologies

This evaluation was conducted according to statutory requirements and professional standards and methods for governmental audits. The research was conducted from January through July 2004.

General Methodology

To compile basic information about the court-ordered placement system, we reviewed relevant statutes, rules, professional literature, legislative history, agency and provider literature, agency budget requests, previous studies and reports from 1979 to 2003, information from other states, and other relevant information. To gain further understanding, we interviewed a variety of past and present state agency officials and managers as well as other persons knowledgeable about the system. We interviewed service providers and toured seven residential treatment centers and one BOCES facility.

DFS, WDE and WDH produced documents and electronic data

We requested state agency documents and electronic data to gather specific cost and placement information on court-placed youth. We obtained copies of contact and payment authorizations, provider billing invoices, payment procedures, and other financial documentation from DFS, WDH, and WDE. In addition, we obtained data from DFS' automated case management system, WYCAPS, in order to analyze placement numbers and per-child costs for FY '99 – '04. We cross-referenced this data with similar data from WDE and WDH for FY '03 – '04. We analyzed each agency's data by individual according to age, gender, placement type, length of stay while in placement, and by provider and service categories.

Since DFS was the agency we engaged for this evaluation, we chose to use DFS data and documentation as the baseline for comparing information from WDE and WDH: for example, in defining providers, counting numbers of children in residential placement, ascertaining providers' daily reimbursement rates, and calculating overall service costs. During preliminary research, we found that many children began placements in one fiscal year, but ended their placement in the following fiscal year(s). Consequently, when assessing the data, we concluded it was more accurate to look at the data covering multiple years. This would better account for those placements that overlapped fiscal years and/or those children who changed providers, and it would also lessen the impact of unknown start and end dates for children's placements which fell outside our information

request parameter for each agency. For example, when aggregating each agency's cost information by RTC provider (shown in Appendix C, Figure C.5), our figures reflect FY '03 – '04 data, as those were the only years for which we received complete datasets from each agency.

Case file review

To review caseworker practices in managing COPs cases and determine whether practices vary according to field office or judicial district, we conducted a case file review of children who were placed during FY '03. Rather than taking a random sample, we chose to draw a systematically stratified sample to ensure a distribution across category type and judicial district. The sample was also expected to include a broad representation of facilities, thus showing a range of acceptable practice in treatment plan specifications.

We chose FY '03 for three reasons. First, calling for records from a completed fiscal year was expected to be less disruptive for caseworkers who might need to use current records for active case management. Second, we anticipated choosing this year would provide a snapshot of cases with a broad range of diversity of youth for both placement stages and scenarios. Third, a new DFS administration took charge during the second half of FY '03; because any of its policy or procedural changes during its first six months would be unlikely to show measurable effects so quickly, this study can be used as a baseline evaluation to gauge the longer-term impacts of such changes.

DFS provided WYCAPS data for 375 cases; after deleting duplicate records, the remaining population consisted of 320 cases. We systematically selected 167 cases which included: all CPS cases, all Northern Arapahoe and Eastern Shoshone placements, and all cases from the smaller districts (those with fewer than 20 cases); the remaining CHINS and delinquent cases were chosen systematically by district based on the total number of each type of case in each district.

Our final sample size was reduced to 135 because of 12 files not produced, and also by our decision to systematically exclude approximately 20 files due to such factors as time constraints (our intent was to return case files promptly), similarities in case file management, and the disproportionately large number of cases we received from three districts.

We examined each of the cases for 212 items mandated by statute, DFS rule, and DFS procedural requirements. Each item was noted as *present* if the information was present in the file regardless of quality or whether it adhered to required format. Due to inconsistencies by field offices and general incompleteness of file documentation, additional quality analysis of case file contents was not feasible. We entered information obtained through this review into an Access database for analysis.