
APPENDIX I

Research 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 August 2007 to July 2008.

General Methodology

To compile basic information about Child Protective Services (Child Protective Services W.S. 14-3-201 through 14-3-216, and related statutes), we reviewed relevant statutes, rules, professional literature, legislative history, agency literature, agency budget requests, previous studies and reports, and other information. To gain further understanding, we interviewed state-level DFS officials and Protective Services Division staff and surveyed local casework supervisors. We interviewed staff who administer the central registry as well as hearing officers from the Office of Administrative Hearings. We also observed meetings including the November 2007 state CFSR review in Laramie; a Child Major Injury and Fatality Review meeting; two DFS Advisory Board meetings; a central registry expungement hearing; and portions of the DFS new caseworker training, CORE. We concentrated on information and events from 1999 to the present.

Department of Family Services: documents

We requested and obtained agency documents to gather cost, staff turnover, casework experience and educational levels. We received reports including the DFS-prepared Self-Assessments for the two federal CFSR reviews, strategic plans, annual reports from DFS and other relevant agencies, the Program Improvement Plan from the first federal CFSR, the Family Services Manual, and CORE training handouts. We also reviewed material from the DFS website.

Department of Family Services: data

The data analyzed for this report should be considered current as of January 1, 2008. We requested and obtained records from WYCAPS on all current and closed CPS incidents since 2000, and we were also granted limited access to WYCAPS screens to gather incident-specific data that complemented our hard-copy file review. WYCAPS data is almost always entered

by field staff around the state and WYCAPS allows caseworkers to over-write some data, but we analyzed only what was displayed at the time of our study. For example, we could not verify whether incidents had been assigned previously to different tracks; we could only tell how incidents were assigned at the time of our query.

LSO case file review

A significant portion of our research consisted of a thorough review of electronic and hard-copy files on individual families. Akin to the state CFSR process, we designated a timeframe for our review to include families with incidents opened January 1, 2004 through December 31, 2007. Some reasons for this timeframe included, but are not limited to the following:

- Four years would be long enough to see most families' full history of DFS contact, and would be a considerably longer (and therefore a more comprehensive) period of review than the state CFSR calls for.
- The longer timeframe would show multiple incidents in multiple tracks for families, when this occurred.
- At the beginning of this timeframe, DFS implemented the family-centered practice casework paradigm, so our sample would show how that practice was implemented throughout the state.

To designate our sample, we took several random samples from the universe of incident identification numbers and related person identification numbers for children subject to allegations of CA/N. We submitted a list of 150 files to DFS: 75 cases with either substantiated or unsubstantiated investigation findings, 35 assessment track cases, 20 prevention track, and 20 untracked cases. In each case, families may have other incidents and other tracks in their history of DFS contacts, but we reviewed the cases primarily for the track type noted at the time of our query. DFS had hard-copy files delivered to Cheyenne; we reviewed these files at the DFS office after reviewing the related electronic records in WYCAPS.