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Southwest Region Response to Decline in Child and Family Assessment Performance

As noted in the Office of Services Review's report of the Southwest Region Qualitative Case Review dated August 2007, there was marked decline in child and family assessment domain. The David C. exit agreement requires the following:

If data collected in the CPR or QCR demonstrate a marked decline in performance or if there is a material increase in caseloads, DHS shall provide an appropriate response to the marked decline in writing, which shall be available on the DHS website.

The Division of Child and Family Services and the Office of Services Review have analyzed several pieces of information and data to determine which factors contributed to the marked decline in performance in child and family assessments. The analysis included review of stakeholder interviews, worker/supervisor interviews, administrative analysis at the regional and the state office level, and discussions with the Office of Services Review. Based on the analysis, the following factors have been identified:

Factors identified in the QCR Report:

1. Missing or delayed formal assessments;
2. Good assessment of the parent, but none for the child;
3. Limited sharing of assessment information among team members;
4. Missing team members that consequently led to a lack of team assessment.

Other factors identified:

1. Staff Turnover at 26% - Increased caseload due to assuming uncovered caseloads.
2. Supervisor turnover at 50%- loss of experienced supervision and mentoring.
3. Supervisors also had to assume caseloads in the crisis period which left them unavailable to their staff at times.
4. Increase of percent in cases where substance abuse is a contributing factor.
(10 % increase in foster care and a 4% increase in home-based cases from 2006).

Southwest Region Response: In an effort to address and improve performance, the Division proposes the attached action plan. The action plan will be monitored by the Administrative Team of the Division at least quarterly.

**Southwest Region
Action Plan for Decline in Child and Family Assessment Performance**

Contributing Factor	Action Item	Responsible Party	Target Date for Completion
Staff Turnover	Vacancies will be announced and interviews conducted within 30 days whenever possible in an effort to fill vacancies promptly and avoid caseload increases.	Management Team, HR Tech, Supervisors	Ongoing
Staff and Supervisor Turnover	The Region Management Team will continue to evaluate current strategies and supervisory retention. This will include exit interviews with departing staff, worker focus groups, and participation on the statewide retention workgroup. This feedback will be compiled, analyzed for trends, and strategies developed related to employee morale and retention.	Management Team, State Office	Worker focus groups will be held by Jan 08; trends analyzed by March 08
Supervisor Turnover	In the event of supervisory turnover, the region will continue to assign a manager to be responsible for the team requiring supervision. That manager will continue with finishing touches interviews until a new supervisor is selected and in place. This management strategy/process is included on every Southwest Region Executive Leadership Team Meeting agenda.	Management Team	Ongoing
Staff and Supervisor Turnover	Regional Quality Improvement Committees will continue their focus on employee recruitment and retention. They can provide support through caseworker recognition events and enlisting other community supports around the agency. Morale is a critical component of retention.	Management Team, QICs, Supervisors	Ongoing
Staff Turnover and Caseload Issues	The region goal will be that supervisors not carry a caseload. Having supervisors carry a caseload is only a short-term solution. When supervisors carry a caseload it leaves many other workers without sufficient support through supervision and mentoring. If turnover of caseworkers is at a high rate, the region will manage cases, as appropriate, utilizing the management team, other region staff resources, and support from the State Administrative Team (additional FTEs, cross-region support, state management team, etc.).	Management Team, Supervisors, State Administrative Team	Ongoing
Quality of Assessments	Supervisors shall complete a finishing touches interview on all cases as they become due for a Child and Family Plan. The finishing touches tool allows a supervisor to evaluate the quality of the assessment, stability of the placement, long-term view for the family, inclusion of formal/informal team supports, and team composition, and to also plan for transitions and examine permanency outcomes.	Management Team, Supervisors	Every case to have a finishing touches review as they become due for a Child and Family Plan.

**Southwest Region
Action Plan for Decline in Child and Family Assessment Performance**

Contributing Factor	Action Item	Responsible Party	Target Date for Completion
Quality and Timeliness of Assessments	In addition to ongoing training on assessment practices in the region (see Southwest Region CI/QA Plan), the State Office is also developing new guides in SAFE to help staff develop better assessments. The state training team will offer in-service training about the use of these guides. The region will increase our focus on ways to check the quality of the assessments. The regional Practice Improvement Coordinator will continue to monitor the finishing touches interviews and entries through the SAFE database. If he/she ascertains that a supervisor is not completing these interviews, or that the quality is lacking, he/she will then work with Program Administrators to ensure the finishing touches process is occurring on a regular basis. This way, the region Practice Improvement Coordinator will ensure that supervisors are adequately reviewing for Child and Family Assessments and long-term view, as well as evaluating the team composition (whether or not all of the key members of the team are included and that the flow of information to the team is sufficient for good planning).	Practice Improvement Coordinator, Program Administrators, Supervisors, State Professional Development Team, State Program Managers	Ongoing
Timeliness and Regularity of Assessments	The regional Practice Improvement Coordinator will continue to review the rate of Child and Family Team Meetings on cases open more than 120 days, and will raise concerns with region management and supervisors if any case goes beyond six months without a Child and Family Team Meeting.	Practice Improvement Coordinator, Management Team, Supervisors, Program Administrators	Ongoing
General Practice Improvement	Supervisors will pay particular attention to in-home cases and cases with TAL youth. The region will identify caseworkers who will become specialized in TAL cases. Specialized TAL staff will be able to become experts on the issues related to older youth. This will allow for greater understanding about the issues of permanency, enduring relationships, and the transition to adult living. The State Office will begin releasing "In-Home Services Hints" and "TAL Tips" on a regular basis through SAFE. These hints/tips will include resources, practice ideas, and "did you knows?".	Management Team, Supervisors, TAL Program Manager, State Office, State Professional Development Team	Southwest Region Complete by January 08; State Office Complete As Soon As Possible
Quality of Assessments and General Practice Improvement	Mentoring plans will be developed for new workers that encourage staff to learn from, and call upon experienced workers throughout the region. Mentoring plans will continue to identify staff who are known as quality performers and who are available for mentoring support in the region.	Supervisors, Teams/Workers, Region Training Manager	Ongoing

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Substance Abuse Issues	Southwest Region administration will conduct outreach with substance abuse providers in the area to educate them about child welfare permanency timeframes and to seek increased support and participation on child and family teams/assessments.	Management Team, State Office, Substance Abuse Providers	Ongoing
Substance Abuse Issues	Many DCFS staff in Southwest Region attended a two day workshop on the "effects of meth on families" in June 07. Community partners and families also attended these workshops. As a result of participating in the workshops, all parties gained valuable information that will assist them in their role of helping families overcome substance abuse issues. DCFS will continue to be involved in the Governor's initiative on meth as a public awareness campaign that rolled out in September.	Management Team, Supervisors, Region Staff	Ongoing