Family Integrity Program’s Systemic Review for 2008/2009

Family Integrity Program (FIP)
2008/2009 System Review

Introduction: A Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) was conducted in Florida in January of 2008. The review included an assessment of 65 case management records, including case specific interviews with key case participants, and a system review of the seven factors related to Florida’s Statewide Information System; Case Review System; Quality Assurance System; Staff and Provider Training; Service Array and Resource Development; Agency Responsiveness to Community; and Foster and Adoptive Home Licensing, Approval, and Recruitment. The final draft CFSR report documents Florida failed to achieve substantial conformity in Case Review System, Staff and Provider Training, and Service Array and Resource Development.

Florida’s statewide quality assurance process includes a review of case files, case specific interviews, and an annual review of all seven systemic factors for each Community-Based Care lead agency. A systemic review of the Family Integrity Program (FIP) was completed through conducting interviews and focus groups with key agency staff, stakeholders, and community partners and the results are summarized below.

Participants: Interviews were conducted with the Circuit 7 Administrator; FIP Alliance member; FIP Licensing Specialist; FIP Chief Executive Officer; FIP Chief Programs Operator; and FIP Quality Assurance Director, and Judges involved with the dependency court.

Additionally, focus groups were conducted with the St. Johns County Child Protective Investigation Supervisors and FIP Dependency Case Manager Supervisors; St. Johns County Child Protective Investigators and FIP Dependency Case Managers; key community service providers, St. Johns County foster parents, and youth served through the Independent Living Program.

Summary of Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Outcomes

Safety: The Safety 1 and Safety 2 Outcomes address the timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of alleged maltreatment, and ensuring when possible and appropriate, children are safely maintained in their homes.

Permanency: The Permanency 1 and 2 Outcomes address the permanency and stability children in their living situations and the efforts made to preserve the children’s family relationships and connections when placed in out-of-home care.
**Well-Being:** The Well-Being 1, 2 and 3 Outcomes address the efforts made to enhance the family's capacity to provide for their children's needs, provision of appropriate services to meet the children's educational needs, and the provision of adequate physical and mental health services to meet the children's needs.

**CFSR Systemic Factors**

**Statewide Information System**
Florida is required to operate a statewide information system that readily and accurately provides information on the status, demographics, location, and goals for all of the children and families served. Agencies involved in the provision of child welfare case management and supervision services are required to maintain the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN), Florida's official information system of record for child welfare investigations and services.

The stakeholder interviews identified a number of proactive steps taken by the circuit and agency to ensure data integrity. When a case is initially staffed for ongoing services either quality assurance staff or the assigned case management supervisor reviews the FSFN case to ensure it is complete and accurate. Follow up occurs with the CPI staff and needed corrections are made. FSFN management reports are used on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis to manage the workload and review and improve performance. Quality assurance staff pull cases assigned on a daily basis to ensure caseloads remain equitable, identify removal and placement errors, and review judicial review reports due. When a problem in navigating the FSFN system is encountered, case management staff routinely seek assistance from the quality assurance staff.

The focus group participants recognized the accuracy of the data is dependent upon the accuracy of the individual inputting information. Some believe additional classroom training on the system is needed. Data reports are helpful, but some suggested the amount of data should be reduced in some of the reports. Additionally, the participants reported assistance is needed in tracking critical case management deadlines and performance measures. Specifically, the participants noted the difficulty in analyzing failed reunifications, because the report provides data, but no case identifying information. The participants also reported it is difficult to extract licensing information.

The Circuit Administrator advised daily reports are used to assist staff and are summarized and forwarded to all supervisors and CPIs to alert them on critical case activities, e.g. number of days a report has been active, victims not seen, etc. The accuracy of these reports is dependent upon the diligence of the supervisors in completing daily checks. Additionally, the approvals management screen and the Leaderboard are used to assess performance within the circuit and across the state. All of the supervisors are trained in pulling this report.
The case management supervisors advised they were told FSFN would pre-populate information but it does not. Staff have to enter the legal status, goal and placement for each child. They also expressed concern they cannot enter more than one reason for a completed contact. They recognized the occasional delays in discharging removals, but overall view the information in the system as accurate.

CPIs are responsible for the data entry during the initial phase of a case, and reported the data is accurate. The one challenge noted was ensuring the foster care placement information for children is correct because they find the placement screen difficult to read. All stated the reports are helpful in managing workload, and the ticklers aid in managing deadlines. Some participants expressed concern about the glitch in the Children Not Seen report and the difficulty merging persons to attach to investigations. Not all reports are accessible to staff, but all reported the supervisors assist them by providing reports to remind them of activities due.

The supervisors reported some problems with the Hotline linking new reports to open reports. Additionally, they advised there are some delays in entering notes and current placements, which can be problematic for CPIs trying to locate a child in a new report received after hours. The supervisors also agreed staff need additional hands on training to address problem areas. Regarding reports, the CPI Supervisors advised the Special Conditions Status Report is not helpful, because it is generated every six hours. There is also no report available to summarize each CPI’s performance each month, which requires supervisors to pull end of month reports for each CPI to evaluate performance, which is time consuming and tedious.

The stakeholder interviews identified the strengths and opportunities documented below.

**Strengths**
- Use of FSFN management reports to manage workload and review performance.
- Supervisors initiative in disseminating management reports to ensure critical information is readily accessible.
- Proactive steps taken by the Circuit and FIP staff to ensure data integrity.

**Opportunities for Improvement**
- Ensuring the Hotline consistently links prior reports to open cases.
- Ensuring the timely discharge of removals, entry of notes and placements (placement changes and respite care).
- Ensuring the accuracy of the child’s legal status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals.
✓ Providing a FSFN monthly report that documents each CPI’s performance on key indicators.

**Case Review System**

Agencies involved in the provision of child welfare case management and supervision services are required to ensure each child in out-of-home care and under the agency’s placement and care has a written case plan with all of the required elements; and the parents participate in developing the written case plan through identifying their strengths and needs, case plan goals, and the specific services needed. Additionally, agencies are required to ensure each case is judicially reviewed at least once every six months and reviewed for permanency at least once every 12 months, and provide evidence the foster, pre-adoptive, relative and non-relative caregivers are notified about the judicial reviews and given an opportunity to be heard regarding the child in their care.

Stakeholder interviews were conducted with the circuit judges involved with dependency court, and St. Johns County foster parents. The judges reported the court orders case plan conferences between the arraignment and pre-trial hearing. If the case plan conference does not result in agreement, the case is set for trial. Mediation is used on occasion when a case plan conference is attempted and unsuccessful.

The judges reported the case plans are current, but noted some delays have occurred in obtaining the Comprehensive Behavioral Health Assessment (CBHA) recommendations and incorporating them into case plans. This concern was reportedly addressed at the quarterly Dependency Court Improvement meetings and it was agreed the Department and FIP will file a motion when a case plan needs to be amended to incorporate these recommendations.

The judges advised they could not be certain all of the parents’ self-identified needs are met through the case planning process, but believed the children’s identified needs were addressed in the final case plan. Judicial reviews are conducted at five months, and the subsequent review is scheduled in court to ensure no delays in scheduling and all participants in attendance are aware of the date and time of the next judicial review. The judges advised St. Johns County has a unified Family Court and the Department and FIP staff are encouraged to access the Family Court file when conducting an investigation or when planning a case action to ensure they are aware of any related concerns brought to the court’s attention.

The judges reported they were not aware of the percent of children, parents, and caregivers who participate in permanency hearings, but encourage children to come to court if they can provide information. They also expressed concern that attending court hearings could interfere with school or participating in extra-curricular activities.
The judges voiced some concerns about not being involved in the beginning discussions about reforming foster care. Specifically, they expressed concern the agency could become the judge and jury if dependency matters are not brought before the court. Both judges reported they would like improved collaboration with the community partners, including the schools, to address case specific concerns.

When asked about how effective the agency is in timely filing termination of parental rights petitions, the judges reported the petitions are filed timely, but expressed concern about some delays in finalizing adoptions. The judges spoke positively about the Children’s Legal Services (CLS) attorneys doing a good job with the dependency cases, and described the managing attorney as “very good” and “stable.”

Dependency court improvement meetings are convened quarterly. The judges agreed the effectiveness of this forum is dependent upon the participation of key community partners, and participation by the Department and FIP staff has at times been inconsistent. This judges stated they had communicated their concern about the lack of participate to both FIP and Department CPI staff.

The judges spoke highly of the St. Johns County Kids Bridge, which provides supervised visitation services. The judges stated they believe it is counter productive for FIP to host visitation for children, and as a result order visitation to be held and supervised by Kids Bridge, because it provides a neutral location, parent coaching, and objective feedback on the visitation.

St. Johns County foster parents also participated in a focus group. The majority of the foster parents reported they had not been notified about a judicial review or a permanency hearing for the children in their care, and most of them also reported they had never been invited to participate in a case staffing. One foster parent reported she had recently seen a finalized case plan, but had never been invited to participate in the development of a case plan. The foster parents stated they believe children are getting the services they need, and if a concern goes unaddressed they communicate with the assigned case manager or supervisor.

One foster parent reported she had asked about court hearings and would like to attend, but added her work schedule would likely interfere with her attendance. The foster parent went on to say she thought the agency was sometimes too quick to terminate a parents’ rights, but added her opinion was based on very limited communication regarding the children’s cases. She went on to say she thought foster parents would be more willing to work with and mentor parents if they had a better understanding of the concerns that brought the family to the attention of the agency and dependency court system.
The stakeholder interviews documented the following strengths and opportunities:

**Strengths**
- Timely judicial review of dependency cases.
- Timely development and approval of case plans.

**Opportunities for Improvement**
- Ensuring both parents and age and developmentally appropriate children have an opportunity to provide input at the judicial review and permanency hearings.
- Ensuring foster parents and relative and non-relative caregivers are invited to participate in judicial reviews, case plan development, and case staffings.
- Reducing delays in receiving CBHA recommendations to ensure they are timely incorporated into case plans.
- Ensuring the delays in finalizing adoptions are minimized.

**Quality Assurance System**
Agencies involved in the provision of child welfare case management and supervision services are required to have a system of measuring differences in the quality of care and outcomes of the children and families served, and a mechanism for focusing continuous quality improvement on areas in need of improvement. Interviews were conducted with the FIP Executive Director and staff, a community alliance member, and the FIP quality assurance staff.

The FIP Quality Assurance Plan describes the key components of the agency’s Quality Assurance system. Agency practice is reviewed through quarterly Base and Side-by-Side quality assurance reviews on 25 randomly selected cases. The final report summarizes the review findings and identifies the agency’s strengths as well as practice concerns.

FIP quality assurance staff were proactive in implementing the revised statewide quality assurance process, and developed and provided training to the agency’s case management staff on both the standards and the enhanced guidelines. Additionally, the agency conducts ongoing internal monitoring that includes a review of key performance measures, client complaints, incident reports, runaway episodes, etc.

The alliance member reported concerns are identified and brought to the attention of the Clinical Director who is responsible for addressing with the FIP managers and staff. Monthly reports are produced for each case manager’s performance regarding home visits, school visits, case openings, and projected closures to assist in managing the workload. Under the new St. Johns County Health and Human Services reorganization, weekly staff meetings are convened and issues are updated bi-weekly. This process has ensured the Alliance is kept
in the loop regarding identified agency concerns and the actions planned to address them.

The stakeholder interviews identified the strengths and opportunities for improvement documented below.

**Strengths**

- Process for ensuring timely communication with the Alliance.
- Training and technical assistance provided by quality assurance staff regarding quality assurance standards and the information systems.

**Opportunities for Improvement**

None noted.

**Staff and Provider Training**

Agencies involved in the provision of child welfare case management and supervision services are required to provide training to staff on state policies and procedures related to safety, permanency, and child well-being outcomes.

FIP employs four trainers. FIP Supervisors described the agency’s system for tracking training requirements, and reported a training file is maintained for each employee. Twice monthly, training is provided to ensure staff maintain their certification as child protection professionals. FIP and CPI staff are allowed to attend both agency and Department training sessions. Staff are informally surveyed to ensure training focuses on current needs, and the training provided has addressed psychotropic medications, adoption, and the dependency court process. A training on the Child and Family Services Review process was conducted in September to ensure staff understand the federal requirements for child protection and child welfare practice. The training provided by the county includes ethics, cultural competency, and safety. For caregivers, training is planned on managing behaviors, parenting for adoptive parents, and educational training on the prevention services available to adoptive, and relative and non-relative caregivers.

The foster parents advised the agency provides a lot of information about training opportunities available in the community and online. The foster parent liaison was described as “wonderful,” and “helpful” in tracking the foster parents’ training requirements.

The stakeholder interviews identified the strengths and opportunities for improvement documented below.
Strengths

✓ Training opportunities are provided by St. Johns County Health and Human Services and FIP throughout the year.
✓ Foster Parent Liaison position to strengthen communication and coordination with foster parents.

Opportunities for Improvement

✓ Consider formally surveying staff and foster parents to ensuring ongoing training needs are identified and addressed.

Service Array and Resource Development

Agencies involved in the provision of child welfare case management services are required to have the capacity to provide services to help children remain with or safely and appropriately return to their families, find a permanent adoptive family or work toward “another planned, permanent living arrangement.” Consideration is given to services provided; gaps identified; accessibility and availability of needed services; and the methods for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of the service array and provision. Child welfare agencies must provide case planning services to the population served, and effective oversight and management of the case planning process. Of critical importance is the agency’s process for ensuring the quality, availability, and accessibility of needed services designed to help at-risk children safely remain in their homes, support reunification, and/or achieve permanency in their relative/non-relative caregiver placement or successfully achieve independence upon reaching adulthood.

An interview was conducted with two 17-year-old teenagers participating in the Independent Living Program. One of the teens is the President of the Youth Advisory Council recently convened. The teens spoke positively about their experience with the Independent Living Program, and reported the services have helped them. They also reported they believe they are better people as a result of their foster care experience. Both individuals reported they have received training in daily living skills such as setting up a checking and savings account, cooking, and cleaning.

When asked about things they would change, both youth agreed their service needs were met, but recommended more communication with youth in care so they understand what is happening in their dependency case. Both reported they had heard about their case plans, but neither one had seen the plan. Additionally, increased flexibility was recommended to allow for travel, extended curfews and having friends over at the foster home. Both youth reported they plan to attend college.
The community provider focus group included individuals providing family visitation services, parent training, and mental health and substance abuse services. The providers were unanimous in identifying the four basic needs of the children and families served to be childcare, transportation, affordable housing and employment.

The providers expressed the greatest frustration with the transportation barrier that frequently presents when attempting to serve children and families. They reported the current transit system is responsive to the needs of tourists, but not to the families frequently served through the dependency system. The strengths included the close proximity of mental health and child welfare staff that allows for optimum communication and coordination. All reported positive and cooperative working relationships, with concerted efforts made to provide for one stop shopping where possible and flexible service provision when needed. The Integrated Services Team meets monthly in an effort to share information and improve service coordination and collaboration. The Integrated Services Team is comprised of representatives from FIP, mental health and substance abuse services, social services and the Neighborhood Partnership.

Some concerns were noted regarding the service referral process. Service referrals are completed, but it is reportedly not always clear the parents were advised of the referral. Additionally, they reported the need for additional Batterer’s Intervention Program (BIP) classes to address the existing need. Regarding new services, the providers identified the need for a 911 Nanny who could be immediately accessed to work with parents in the home, as well as a parent aide program that could assist parents in improving their parenting and housekeeping skills. Counseling services for families after adoption finalization was also an identified service need.

Representatives from the Child Protection Team (CPT) were interviewed, but reported they work primarily with the St. Johns County CPI staff and are not familiar with the FIP service array. CPT staff identified intensive in-home services are critical to protecting children in their home, and identified the need for additional therapists, skilled in treating abused and neglected children, as key to preventing removal.

CPT staff currently convenes a monthly “Protocol Meeting” with both CPI Supervisors and law enforcement staff with the goal of improving the exchange of information and providing needed training. CPT advised they would welcome FIP’s participation in this monthly forum, because FIP could train the participants on the service array and resource needs.
When CPT was asked if they request or receive feedback on the recommendations developed at a CPT staffing or as a result of a medical evaluation, they reported no follow up occurs. They acknowledged they are not aware if barriers or challenges (transportation, waiting lists, etc.) prevent following up on the recommendations made.

CPI staff reported domestic violence intervention services, mental health evaluations, and longer-term substance abuse inpatient and outpatient treatment programs are needed. The staff reported after care does not exist to address relapse when it occurs, and domestic violence service providers will not respond to the home.

The stakeholder interviews identified the strengths and opportunities for improvement documented below.

**Strengths**
- Close proximity of mental health and child welfare staff supports optimum communication and coordination.
- Close and cooperative working relationships of key service providers.
- Establishment of the Integrated Services Team to improve communication and collaboration among service providers.

**Opportunities for Improvement**
- Increase the participation of Independent Living youth in the case planning process and judicial reviews.
- Expand employment opportunities for youth served through the Independent Living Program.
- Review service referral process to ensure parents’ awareness of the referral is documented.
- Expand BIP schedule to accommodate the current need.
- Consider the need for additional in-home services to provide parent support and training when reviewing or expanding the current service array.
- Determine whether current funding allows for the provision of post adoption counseling services.
- Consider identifying a representative to participate in the CPT monthly Protocol meeting.

**Agency Responsiveness to Community**
A successful child welfare agency occurs in part through developing and nurturing positive working relationships between and among community providers and key stakeholders. Stakeholders were asked to identify the current process for incorporating community input into its planning, policies, and practice.

A community alliance member was interviewed and reported FIP receives a lot of input from the community. The agency works with the school system to ensure
children’s educational needs are met, and case managers are required to contact each child’s teacher to obtain a report on each child’s progress.

FIP ensures regular communication with their providers, and has a position devoted to provider communication to facilitate communication and service coordination. Quarterly meetings are convened with the Integrated Service Provider Network and provide an opportunity for problem identification and resolution, and information sharing. FIP also meets monthly with the foster parents, and participates in the quarterly dependency court improvement meetings focused on opportunities for better serving children and families and the timely achievement of permanency.

FIP staff pick up CPI referrals for ongoing services on a daily basis, and meet with the CPI within 24 hours of receiving a referral to discuss the service needs. Cases are assigned and the initial contact is timely completed. The process for accessing a placement for children removed has reportedly improved “1000%” with the average wait time reduced to 30 minutes.

FIP conducts formal surveys semi-annually to obtain input from community partners, service providers, and key stakeholders. Surveys are forwarded to schools, law enforcement and social services agencies. Additionally, surveys are sent semi-annually to both foster parents and adoptive parents to request their input on the services received and needs.

The stakeholder interviews identified the strengths and opportunities for improvement documented below.

**Strengths**

- Timely communication with alliance members.
- Establishment of a provider liaison to facilitate communication and service coordination.
- Positive and cooperative working relationship between FIP and CPI staff.

**Opportunities for Improvement**

None noted.

**Foster and Adoptive Home Licensing, Approval, and Recruitment**

The CFSR process considers the agency’s efforts to ensure adherence to all of the requirements related to recruitment, training, and approval of foster and adoptive families.

FIP adheres to the 30 hour Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP) curriculum to train prospective foster and adoptive parents. The initial licensure process is based on the mutual selection concept promoted through the MAPP curriculum. Relicensing activities begin 90 days in advance of the license expiration date.
FIP’s re-licensing process considers the licensed caregiver’s past performance in providing care for children placed in the home. Staff are also given an opportunity to provide feedback on foster homes at the time they are re-licensed, and the children served provide feedback through participation in an exit interview. Once licensed, staff understand they are responsible for reporting concerns if any are identified or observed in the licensed home, and FIP ensures follow-up occurs on each reported concern.

At the time this systemic review was conducted, FIP had 48 licensed foster homes. The FIP Placement Coordinator is reportedly knowledgeable about each licensed foster home’s strengths, and refers to the family profile, required at the time of the initial licensure, when a placement request is received. FIP’s goal is to license 50 foster family homes to address their out-of-home care population.

FIP’s approach to recruitment is to “cast a wider net,” through public service announcements in schools and newspapers. For 2008, the licensing department adopted the One Church, One Child Program’s philosophy to challenge each church in St. Johns County to foster/adopt one child. The licensing department sends letters to all churches requesting time to speak to members of each congregation about foster/adopt and outlines the needs for foster/adopt homes. FIP staff advised they frequently benefit from the recruitment efforts launched by the CBCs serving the surrounding counties.

FIP’s population of children in care was mapped through the environmental scan by zip code. The “wider net” approach is used with the goal of attracting homes in certain areas of the county, as well as homes to meet the needs of sibling groups. Some foster homes are designated short-term placement providers, because the foster parents expressed an interest in providing short-term care until the best “match” could be made, and to limit the number of placement changes children experience.

The St. Johns County Foster Parent Association convenes monthly, and was described as very organized. The association assists foster parents by providing in-service training opportunities. Additionally, FIP maintains a library of videotapes of topics of interest, and group classes are offered for CPR/First Aid and Water Safety (required in St. Johns); psychotropic medication, and other topics of interest to foster parents. An electronic mail list is used to share information with foster parents, including hurricane preparedness, and to advise them of training opportunities in the community.

The foster parent association representative recognized the agency’s efforts to ensure the appropriateness of homes and the safety of the children served through scheduled and unannounced visits to the home, checking the children’s bedrooms, requiring health inspections, and completing background checks on adults who will have ongoing contact with the children.
The stakeholder interviews identified the following strengths and opportunities for improvement.

**Strengths**

- Efforts to recruit licensed providers in the neighborhoods where children are frequently removed.

**Opportunities for Improvement**

None noted.

**Recommendations**

This report documents a number of opportunities for improvement by FIP or the Department. The recommendations below specifically highlight opportunities in the systemic factors related Case Review, Staff and Provider Training, and Service Array, as these were identified in the October final draft CFSR report for Florida as areas in need of improvement.

1. Develop a decision matrix to clarify the role and participation of the foster parent in the dependency process and share the information with them.  
   **Note:** The Department convened a statewide workgroup to draft a decision matrix for final approval and implementation. The proposal is currently under review.

2. Consider implementing an annual survey of case management staff to identify their training needs.

3. Consider providing cross-training to licensed foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and case management staff to increase the understanding of each person’s role and responsibilities.

Signed by:  
1/27/2009  
Quality Assurance Manager     Date

1/27/2009  
Program Administrator     Date