The exit conference was held on November 5, 2009 with representatives from the lead agency, the two case management organizations, the Circuit 20 Administrator and members of the side by side review team participating. The period of review was January 1, 2009 through September 30, 2009. The ages of the children in this sample ranged from one to thirteen years. The breakdown of the type of cases included in this side by side review sample consisted of one child living in his own home, four children placed in out of home care during the entire review period, two other children were also in out of home care but were reunified during the period under review, and one child’s case had been closed to long term relative custody, but when the relative became very ill, the non-custodial father petitioned the court for custody and the case was reopened to provide services when the child was placed in his father’s home. The children in this sample had the following goals as of the end of the review period: Maintain and Strengthen – 4; Adoption – 2; Reunification – 1; and Permanent Guardianship – 1. The number of months the case had been opened as of the end of the review period ranged from 10 to 48 months.

**Strengths**

- **There were no reports of re-abuse, re-neglect received during the period under review nor were any immediate safety concerns noted in any case in the review sample**
- **There was noted improvement in the quality of supervisory reviews in a majority of the cases**
  Supervisory reviews in six of the cases were rated as being qualitative overall. Two of these six cases were considered exceptional in the quality of guidance that was provided and in the quality of the supervisory reviews. These two cases also received the highest scores of the eight side by side cases.
- **Placement Stability**
  There was placement stability for five of the six children who were in out of home care during the review period, in that the children experienced no more than two placements during the period under review.
- **There were current case plans in every case and all but one of the plans had an appropriate permanency goal**
  While each case contained a current case plan, reviewers rated one case as not having an appropriate permanency goal as the primary goal for the two year old
was changed from reunification to permanent guardianship with a relative without documented efforts to discuss adoption with the relatives or taking other measures to rule out adoption as the appropriate permanency goal.

- **Efforts to complete the initial and six month family assessments in the FSFN system were noted.**  
  An initial family assessment was completed in the one applicable case.

- **Judicial Review Social Study Reports were completed timely and contained pertinent details relating to the child in seven of the cases.**

- **Indian Child Welfare Act inquiries were completed as per the requirements in seven of the cases.**  
  This is a marked improvement as compared to the previous fiscal year.

- **Improvement was noted in the area of engaging parents from whom the child was removed or engaging the parent with whom the child was residing.**  
  Efforts to engage parents who were motivated and resided in close proximity to the child were noted.

- **Improvement in the frequency of contacts with children and caregivers**  
  The frequency of contacts with the child was appropriate in seven of the eight cases and the frequency of contacts with caregivers was sufficient in four of six applicable cases. The overall (roll-up) rating for this standard was that the frequency of contacts with all participants was appropriate in five of the eight cases. This was an opportunity for improvement in the last side by side review.

- **Dental needs were assessed in three of five applicable.**

- **Stability of Case Managers**  
  Four of the cases reviewed had one case manager assigned for the entire review period. The remaining four cases had two case managers during the review period.

**Opportunities for Improvement**

- **While improvement was seen in the number of six month family assessments that have been completed in FSFN, efforts are needed to ensure that they adequately reflect an assessment of critical issues pertaining to the family and do not just answer the questions. Additionally, it is critical that they are updated at least every six months and at critical junctures in the case, such as reunification.**  
  Assessments need to include: a review of changes impacting child safety, review of changes in family factors affecting resources, strengths or protective capacities, emerging danger, and a review of case plan goals.

- **Documentation of ongoing communication with service providers regarding the effectiveness of services for case participants.**  
  Documentation of ongoing communication with service providers to assess what if any progress was being made occurred in two of the eight cases. This was an opportunity for improvement in the last side by side review as well.

- **Concerted efforts to engage case participants in the case planning process**
This involves more than the process of developing the case plan. It includes ongoing discussions with parents, the child, and caregivers regarding the goal/tasks or changes to the goal/tasks as required.

- **Quality of the case manager’s contacts with case participants**
  The overall score for quality of contacts with all case participants was 25% achieved. The break-out results for individual participants included: mothers: 67%, fathers: 60%, child: 38%, and caregivers: 17%. At this point it is unknown as to whether or not the poor results were due to a lack of documentation or due to a failure on the part of case managers to ask probing, follow-up questions in their contacts with participants

- **While improvement was noted in engaging the parent removed from or the custodial parent, the down side is that increased efforts are still needed to engage the other parent, including incarcerated parents.**
  Reviewers noted that the “out of sight out of mind” phenomenon was prevalent. Case managers tended to focus on the parent who was perceived to be critical to goal achievement and have not made a practice of demonstrating concerted efforts to engage the other parents as required. It is hoped that the upcoming focus on family centered services will provide a better understanding of the need to engage each parent.

**Recommendations for Improvement**

1. It is recommended that the Case Management Organizations consider adopting a more “hands on” mentoring approach by supervisors to guide staff in learning and improving skills needed to more effectively engage families/children, such as supervisors going out in the field with case managers to better assess each case manager’s interviewing skills. In addition the supervisor could review the note created from the home visit to address the quality of the documentation when necessary.

2. Continue efforts to track the timely completion of a qualitative initial family assessment upon meeting with the family in order to make a determination of immediate and long term family strengths and needs. Ensure that ongoing assessments continue throughout the life of the case, utilizing information obtained from case participants, service providers, observations and interaction, as well as, information learned from other sources to provide a complete and accurate assessment of current family functioning as long as the case remains open to services.

3. Proceed with plans to implement the statewide Family Centered Practice initiative which is heavily focused on improving family assessment and engagement.