



**Quality Service Review  
Branch and Hillsdale Counties**

Review Conducted  
March 2018

# Quality Service Review

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## Introduction

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Division of Continuous Quality Improvement (DCQI) conducted a Quality Service Review (QSR) to provide a comprehensive view of case practice in Branch and Hillsdale Counties on March 19-22, 2018.

The QSR includes in-depth interviews with case participants, stakeholder interviews, focus groups and surveys. While the QSR process allows an opportunity for participants to share their perceptions in individual and focus group interviews, the validity of the statements made are not verified by the reviewer or facilitators. Child welfare communities may use the information gleaned from the focus groups, stakeholder interviews, and the case reviews collectively, to inform improvement efforts. Following the QSR, a Practice Improvement Plan (PIP) is developed by the county director to address identified areas needing improvement.

The QSR is a real-time assessment of how children and their families are benefiting from services, identifying practice strengths as well as opportunities where coordination and collaboration can be improved. The QSR examines the county’s progress implementing the MiTEAM case practice model, which focuses on seven competencies: Engagement, Assessment, Teaming, Case Planning, Placement Planning, Case Plan Implementation, and Mentoring using two distinct domains or sets of indicators, “Child and Family Status Indicators” and “Case Practice Performance Indicators.” Child and family status is based on a review of the focus child and the parent(s) or caregiver(s) for the most recent 30-day period, unless stated otherwise in the indicator. Practice performance is based on a review of the most recent 90-day period for cases that have been open and active for at least the past 90 days.

The QSR uses a six-point rating scale to determine whether an indicator is acceptable. Any indicator scoring at a four or higher is viewed as acceptable. Indicators that are scored as a three or lower are considered unacceptable. All indicators with an overall baseline score of 75 percent or above are identified as a strength and an area to maintain. Any indicator scoring at 74 percent or lower would be included and addressed as an opportunity for improvement.

The rating scale is also broken into three categories: maintain (5-6), refine (3-4) and improve (1-2). The ranges are as follows:

UNACCEPTABLE			ACCEPTABLE		
<b>1 – Adverse Status/ Performance:</b>	<b>2 – Poor Status/ Performance:</b>	<b>3 – Marginally Inadequate Status / Performance:</b>	<b>4 – Fair Status/ Performance:</b>	<b>5 – Good Ongoing Status/ Performance:</b>	<b>6 – Optimal &amp; Enduring Status / Performance:</b>
Status/practice may be absent or substantially inadequate. Performance	Status/practice is fragmented, unreliable, lacking necessary	Status/practice may be insufficient, inconsistent, or not well matched	Status/practice is minimally or temporarily adequate to meet short-	At this level, the status/practice is functioning reliably and appropriately	At this level, there is exceptional, steady, and

may be missing or not done. Strategies may be inadvisable and in need of immediate action to address the situation.	intensity, or validity. Performance warrants prompt attention and improvement.	to need. Performance may be falling below the acceptable range and there is a need for adjustment at the present time.	term needs or objectives. There is a reasonable prospect of achieving the desired outcomes if this performance level continues or improves.	under changing conditions and over time. Performance has continued to be generally effective and dependable with signs of stability being apparent.	effective status/practice in the function area. Performance has shown an enduring pattern of stability.
<b>IMPROVEMENT</b>		<b>REFINEMENT</b>		<b>MAINTENANCE</b>	

Michigan has developed a four-prong approach to illustrate the connection between the implementation of the MiTEAM case practice model to good outcomes for children and families in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being for children and families. The four prongs include the use of the evaluation to MiFidelity, results from a Quality Service Review, measurement of Key Performance Indicators and the Child and Family Service Review Outcomes.

The QSR findings in concert with these metrics support local offices and the state to understand the strengths and opportunities within a child welfare community.

When child welfare members implement the key behaviors or activities of the practice model and track key performance indicators on a regular basis, the direct outcomes experienced by children and families as measured by the federal Child and Family Services Review in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being can be achieved.

Branch and Hillsdale Counties are made up of small rural farming communities. Lakeland Correctional Facility is located in the city of Coldwater within Branch County. This facility serves as a large employer for the community. Hillsdale County is the home of Hillsdale College, a small four year liberal arts college which provides a good source of collaboration for the child welfare community. Branch and Hillsdale Counties are part of Business Service Center (BSC) 4 situated in the lower part of the state bordering the State of Indiana.

At the time of the review in March 2018, Branch and Hillsdale Counties were providing foster care services to 103 and 132 children respectively<sup>1</sup>. In Branch and Hillsdale Counties the number of children in care at the time of the review accounted for less than one percent of the total number of children in the State of Michigan’s foster care population. Children under the age of nine represented 63 percent of the foster care population in Branch County and 71 percent in Hillsdale County<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Data provided in the Monthly Fact Sheet March 2018 produced by the Data Management Unit within the Division of Continuous Quality Improvement.

Many of the child welfare professionals that work in these areas also reside in these communities, and are vested in the community’s welfare. Most of the professionals are familiar with the families they are servicing and a bond or trust is developed and maintained, extending beyond case closure. These professionals also have relationships with law enforcement and court personnel, which allows them to collaborate with each other on a regular basis. At times, this can be challenging as personal and professional boundaries can be tested; however, supervision monitors this as necessary.

Smaller communities often experience difficulties related to the variety and availability of resources. This was noted as a challenge among child welfare professionals. With limited access to providers and services, children and families can be limited on the quality of services they are provided. Workers are often forced to use an available service, which in turn may not be the most appropriate service to address the need and could impact the family’s progress with developing appropriate resourcefulness. Despite the limitations, for the area of Permanency, Branch County scored at 83.3 percent and Hillsdale County scored at 100 percent. Both Branch and Hillsdale counties scoring above 80 percent in Permanency, it appears the limited resource pool has not directly affected the achievement of permanency. The teams are still ensuring that children and families are receiving appropriate services to address their needs.

## Findings

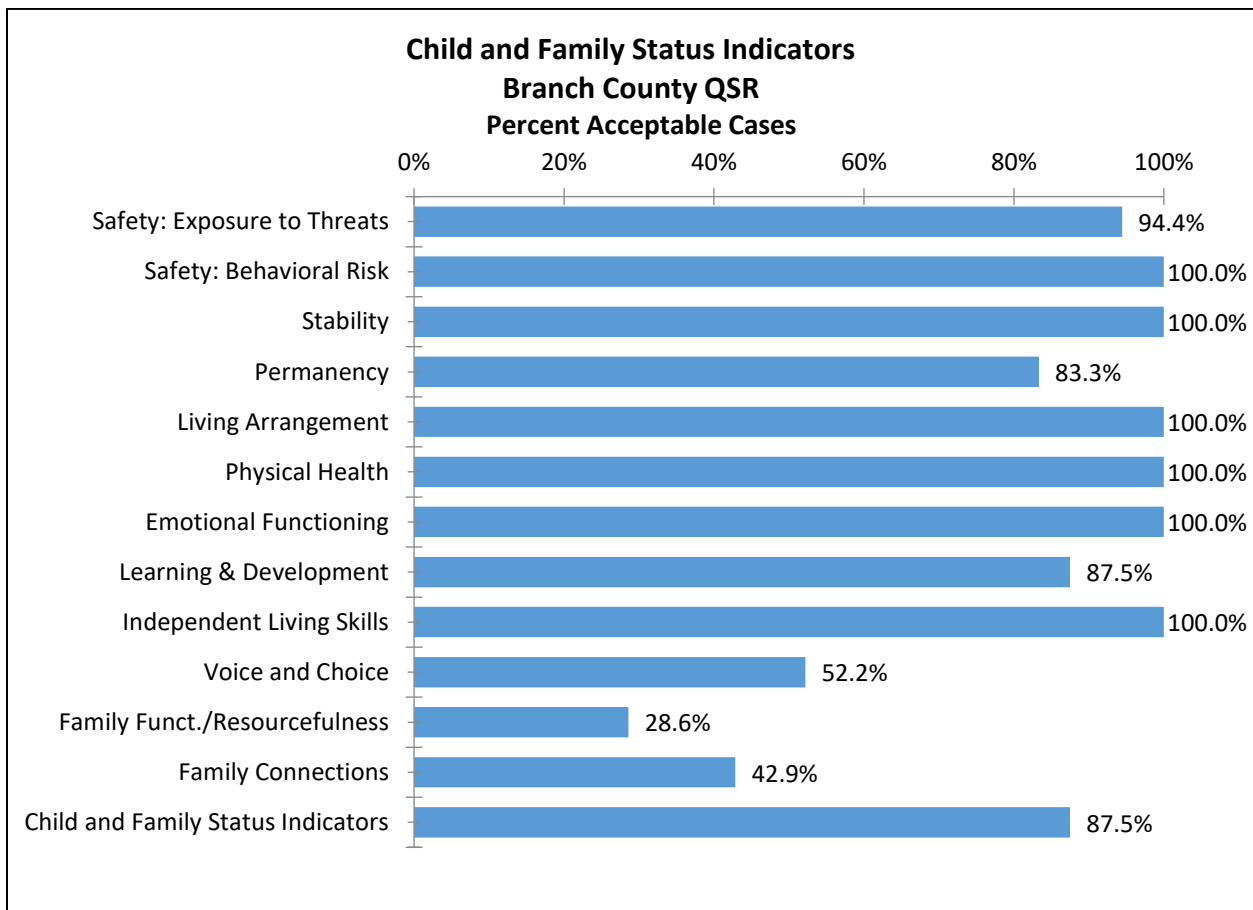
Sixteen cases or eight per county, were randomly selected from a sample that was stratified based on children’s age, placement type and case status. Six foster care and two child protective services (CPS) on-going cases were reviewed in each county. In Branch County the case reviews included 60 interviews. In Hillsdale County the case reviews included 66 interviews. A total of 126 interviews were completed over the QSR week in both locations.

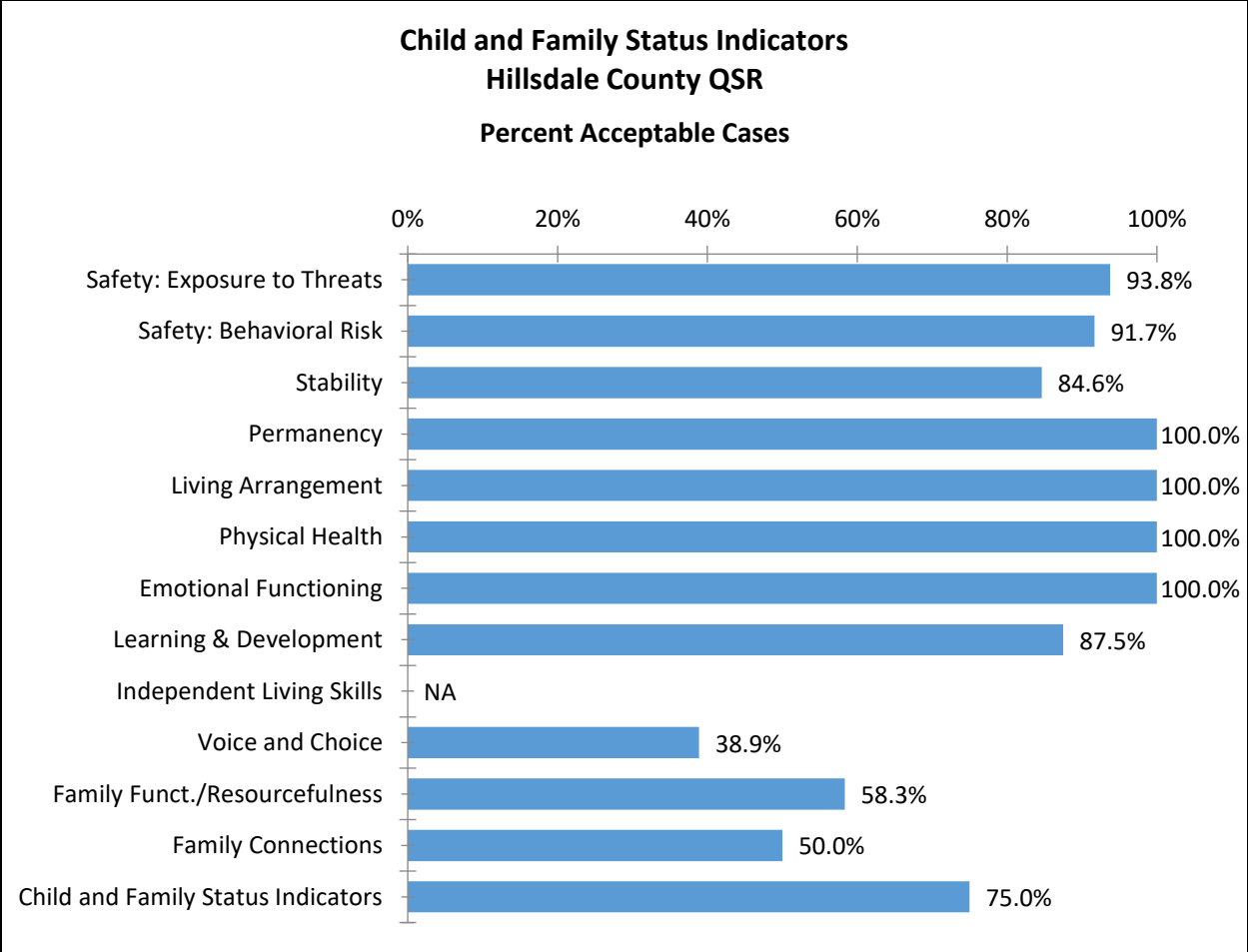
	Branch County	Hillsdale County
<b>Age of Children</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>
0 to 4 years old	1	4
5 to 9 years old	3	3
10 to 13 years old	3	1
14 to 17 years old	1	0
18 to 21 years old	0	0
TOTAL	8	8
<b>Time in Care</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>
4 to 6 months	2	3
10 to 12 months	4	2
13 to 18 months	0	3
19 to 36 months	2	0
TOTAL	8	8
<b>Type of Placement</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>

Parental Home	3	3
Unlicensed Relative	3	2
Licensed Relative	1	1
Unrelated Licensed Foster Home	1	2
Pre-Adoptive	0	0
Residential	0	0
Independent Living	0	0
TOTAL	8	8

## Child and Family Status Indicators

Child and Family Status Indicators provide a picture of where the child and the family are functioning at the time of the review. The length of time a case is open can impact a rating and should be considered when reviewing the overall score. Child and Family Status Indicators concentrate on the outcomes of Safety, Well-Being and Permanence. The following scores reflect only those that fell in the acceptable (4-6) range.





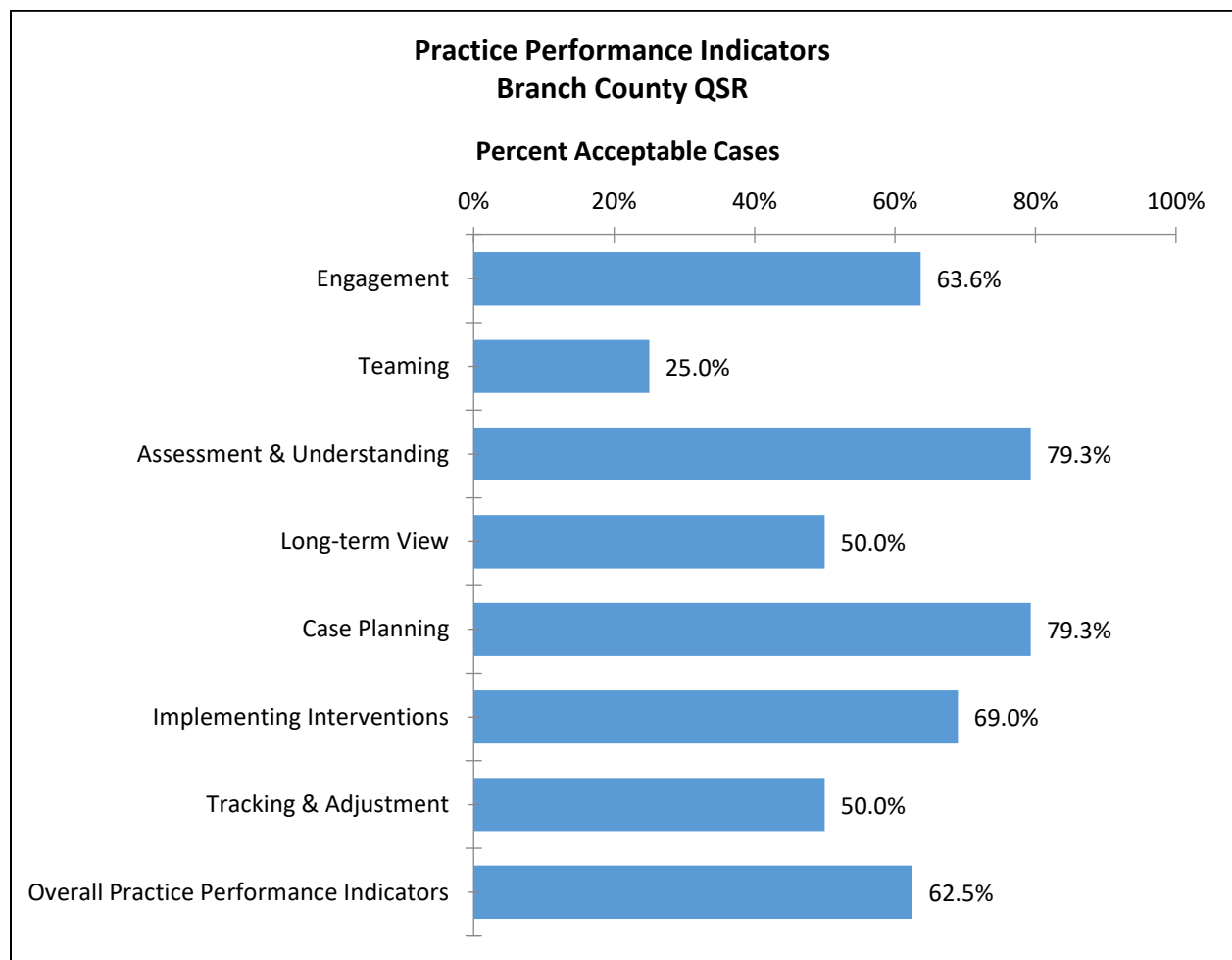
In Branch and Hillsdale counties, the children’s current living arrangements were found to be safe, the least restrictive setting and appropriate to meet the focus children’s needs. Children were found to be healthy and receiving regular medical and dental appointments. In Branch and Hillsdale Counties, substance abuse and domestic violence were identified as challenges. With the allotted timeframes for parents to complete treatment plan services, there has been an increase in pending termination cases in Hillsdale County. Parents with substance abuse problems or incarceration often take several months to resolve these issues, putting the parents behind in completing their treatment plan. The court is considerate of this and often discusses extending their time to complete the service plan with team members if the parents are benefiting from services. In both counties the staff and court personnel appear empathetic to the family’s needs and places the priority on what is in the best interest of the child(ren) and this can be seen in the Permanency score of 100%.

Affordable housing and school truancy were noted barriers in Branch County. Families are forced to live transiently or often reside in motels. This had immediate effects on children by causing some educational difficulties. Although some barriers were noted in the area of education, most children are placed in an appropriate school setting with their educational

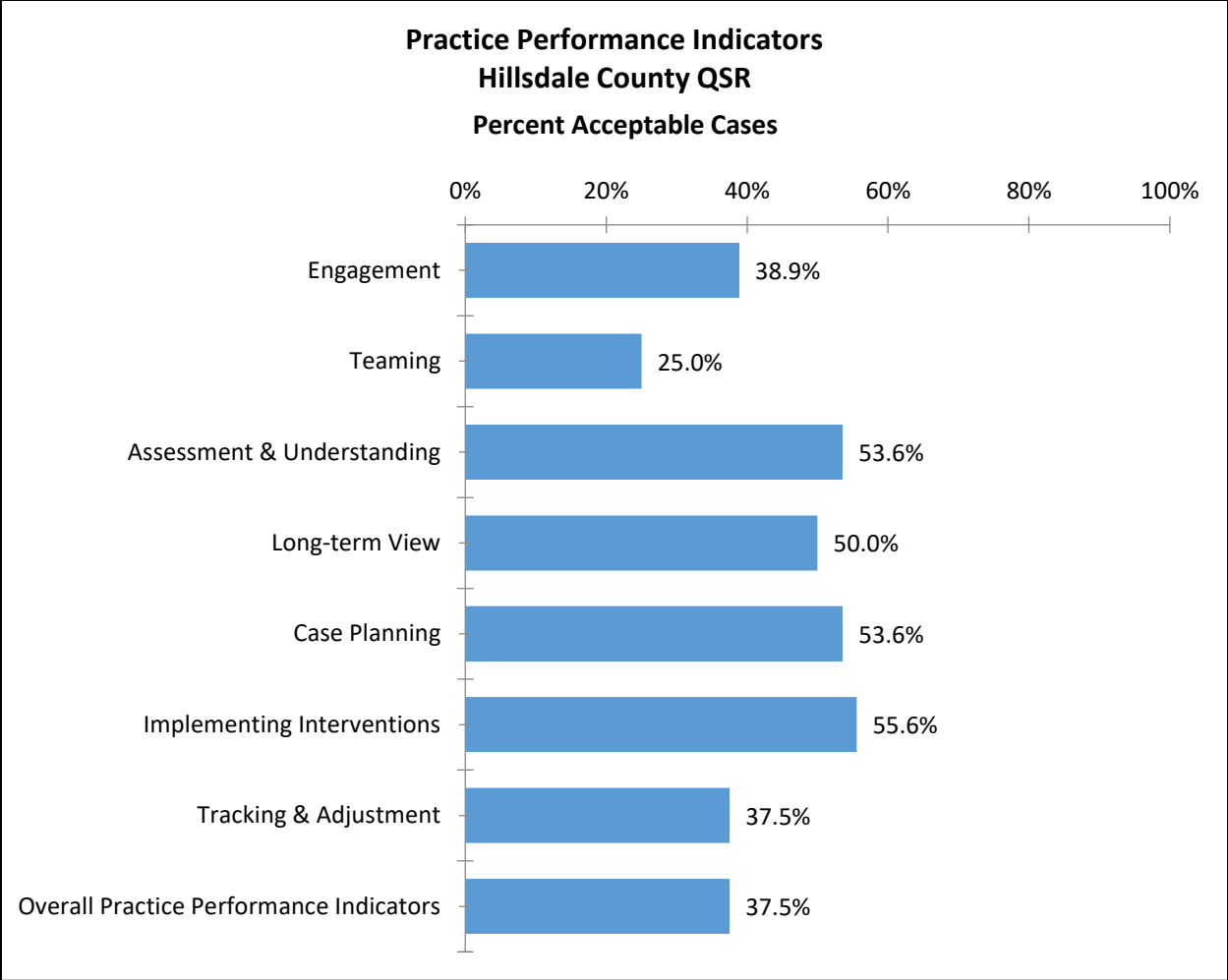
needs being met. Overall, the area of academics for Branch and Hillsdale Counties scored at 83.3 percent.

## Practice Performance Indicators

Practice Performance Indicators are a set of activities that correlate with the seven MiTEAM competencies and is the primary tool used to measure how well the child welfare community is implementing the case practice model. The practice indicators are assessed based on (1) whether the strategies and supports are being provided in an adequate manner; (2) whether the strategies and supports are working or not based on the progress being made; and (3) whether the outcome has been met. The following scores reflect only those that fell in the acceptable (4-6) range.







*\*In 2018, the QSR Protocol was updated. The Case Planning indicator has changed. Previously this indicator was named Planning Interventions and scored in four categories: Safety/Protection, Well-Being, Permanency and Transition to Life Adjustment. The Implementing Interventions indicator has changed and multiple individuals are now scored (child, mother, father caregiver and other). The previous QSR Protocol only assessed one score for this indicator.*

In Branch County, the areas of Engagement, Teaming, Implementing Interventions and Tracking and Adjustment all scored as an opportunity for improvement. In Hillsdale County, the areas of Engagement, Teaming, Assessment and Understanding, Case Planning, Implementing Interventions and Tracking and Adjustment all scored as an opportunity for improvement. Both counties scored at 50 percent for Long-term View. Teaming has a direct impact on case practice. Teaming scored at 25 percent in each county. Although the scores may differ many of the same barriers were noted in each county.

Generational abuse and neglect is an unfortunate reoccurrence within smaller communities and presents additional challenges for team members. At times, it will limit the informal supports for children and families as well as limit possible placement options with relatives.

Most workers complete thorough and current assessments of family member's situations without weighing the family members past.

Currently one of the biggest challenges for Hillsdale County is staff turnover. The county has several vacancies, which poses as a challenge for workers and caseloads. This also has affected the morale of staff in the county. Many CPS worker reported being out of case load compliance and overwhelmed with the job expectations. They reported that supervisors are very supportive and expressed concern that there is no real plan on how to resolve this barrier. Staff turnover is not a usual occurrence in Hillsdale County, but has been ongoing for the last several months. Staff turnover was also reported among the private agency partners. This was reported throughout several focus groups and was also identified as a trend within the cases reviewed. Staff turnover has had a direct impact on workers ability to engage with families. The overall score for Hillsdale County for Engagement was 38.9 percent.

Teamwork was evident in Branch and Hillsdale Counties as a strong collaboration with law enforcement was identified as a strength. Several times throughout the review law enforcement was present at the MDHHS office meeting with staff. However, one area that appears to be a challenge for workers is the coordination of meetings. Children and families had strong teams of service providers but no coordination of meetings. Often, the worker was communicating frequently with all team members but no direct communication between the team members was occurring. Informal supports were not included in the teaming process. This led to many team members not agreeing with the child or family's needs and their long-term view. The overall score for Teaming in Branch and Hillsdale Counties was 25 percent.

## **Summary from Focus Groups and Stakeholder Interviews**

### **Branch County**

Six individual stakeholder interviews were conducted and six stakeholder focus groups with a total of 58 participants. The findings from the individual focus groups are outlined in Appendix A.

#### **Strengths:**

- Positive work environment for staff and supervisors. A strong staff morale exists in the local MDHHS office and between private partners.
- A strong and supportive relationship with court and law enforcement exists.
- Supervisors are consistent and staff members know their expectations.

#### **Opportunities for Improvement:**

- The limited amount of resources (mental health, substance abuse, housing, and transportation) presents challenges for team members and families.
- Additional foster homes are needed to ensure children can remain in the community.
- A support network for caregivers would be a useful resource.

## **Hillsdale County**

Four individual stakeholder interviews were conducted and six stakeholder focus groups with a total of 28 participants. The findings from the individual focus groups are outlined in Appendix B.

### Strengths:

- Staff members from across programs work well together.
- Hillsdale County has a support group for foster parents in person and online.
- A good relationship with law enforcement exists.
- Workers live in the area and can build relationships.
- Workers are always available to foster parents, service providers and law enforcement even after hours.

### Opportunities for Improvement:

- A need for additional services in the following areas: transportation, domestic violence treatment for batterers, housing, local domestic violence counseling, in-patient substance abuse, crisis mental health.
- There is a limited number of contracted service providers which can present as a problem when case planning and implementing services.
- Additional trainings for staff that are closer in location. In addition, more on-job training for new workers versus the classroom for new workers would be helpful.

## **Ongoing Monitoring Systems**

The QSR is one-step in measuring and monitoring the ongoing progress within the child welfare system statewide. Although the QSR uses a unique and qualitative approach, other monitoring systems examine the compliance of statewide standards.

The Fidelity Tool is used to ensure that the main competencies of the case practice model: teaming, engagement, assessment and mentoring, are being implementing and used effectively by field staff. Key Performance Indicators (KPI) are identified areas of compliance used to benchmark progress within the child welfare system statewide. All these areas of measurement are used to lead us to the desired outcomes as measured in the Child and Family Services Review.

The CFSR assesses the outcomes of services provided to children and families. The CFSR examines systemic factors that affect the ability of the state to help children and families achieve positive outcomes. The CFSR includes a review of the Michigan AFCARS and NCANDS data, statewide self-assessment, case reviews conducted by federal and state reviewers and interviews with key stakeholders.

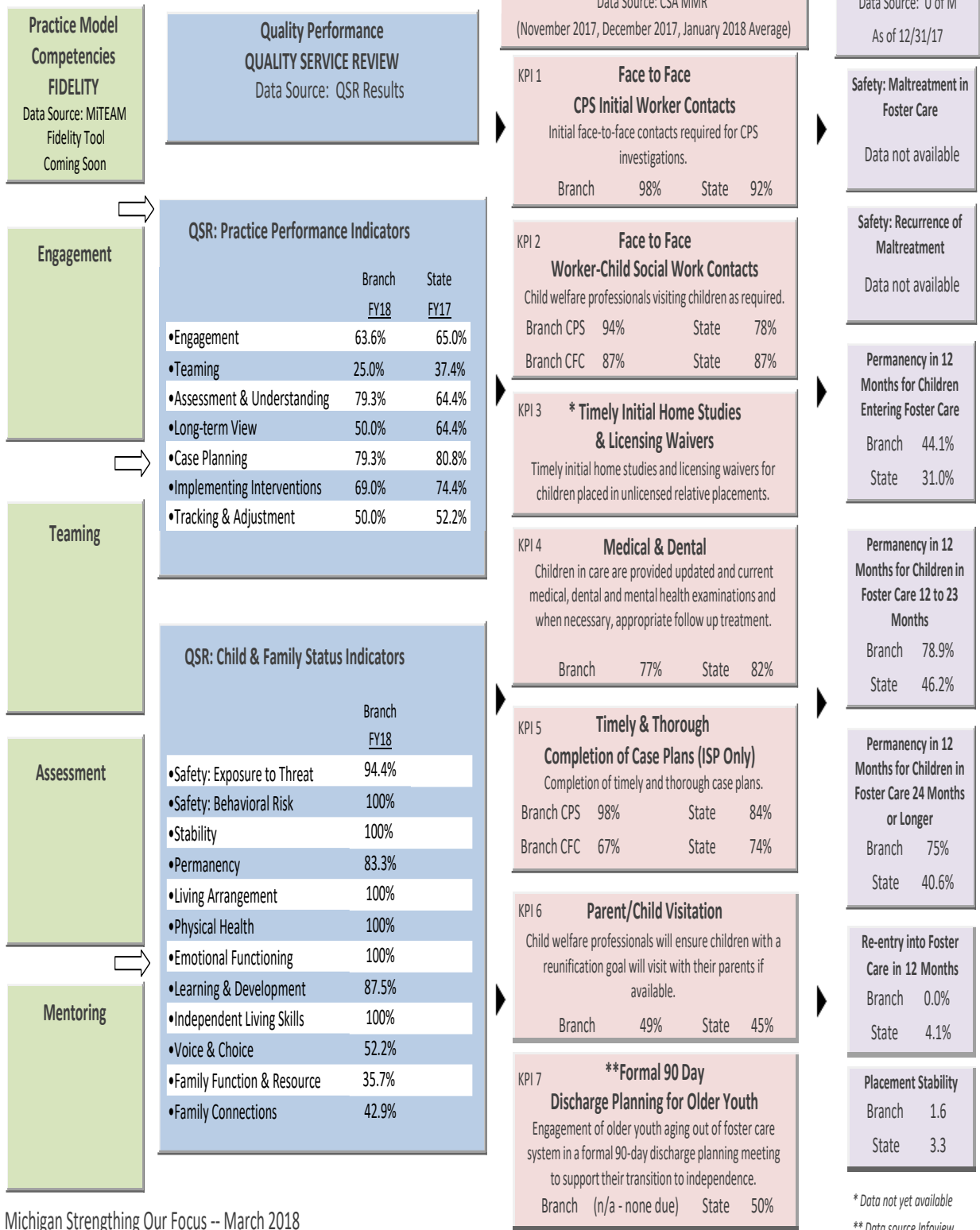
The CFSR assesses the following areas to promote child safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes:

- Safety Outcome 1: Children are first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
- Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.
- Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
- Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.
- Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.
- Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

The CFSR focuses on the entire statewide welfare system and examines the effectiveness using seven systemic that include:

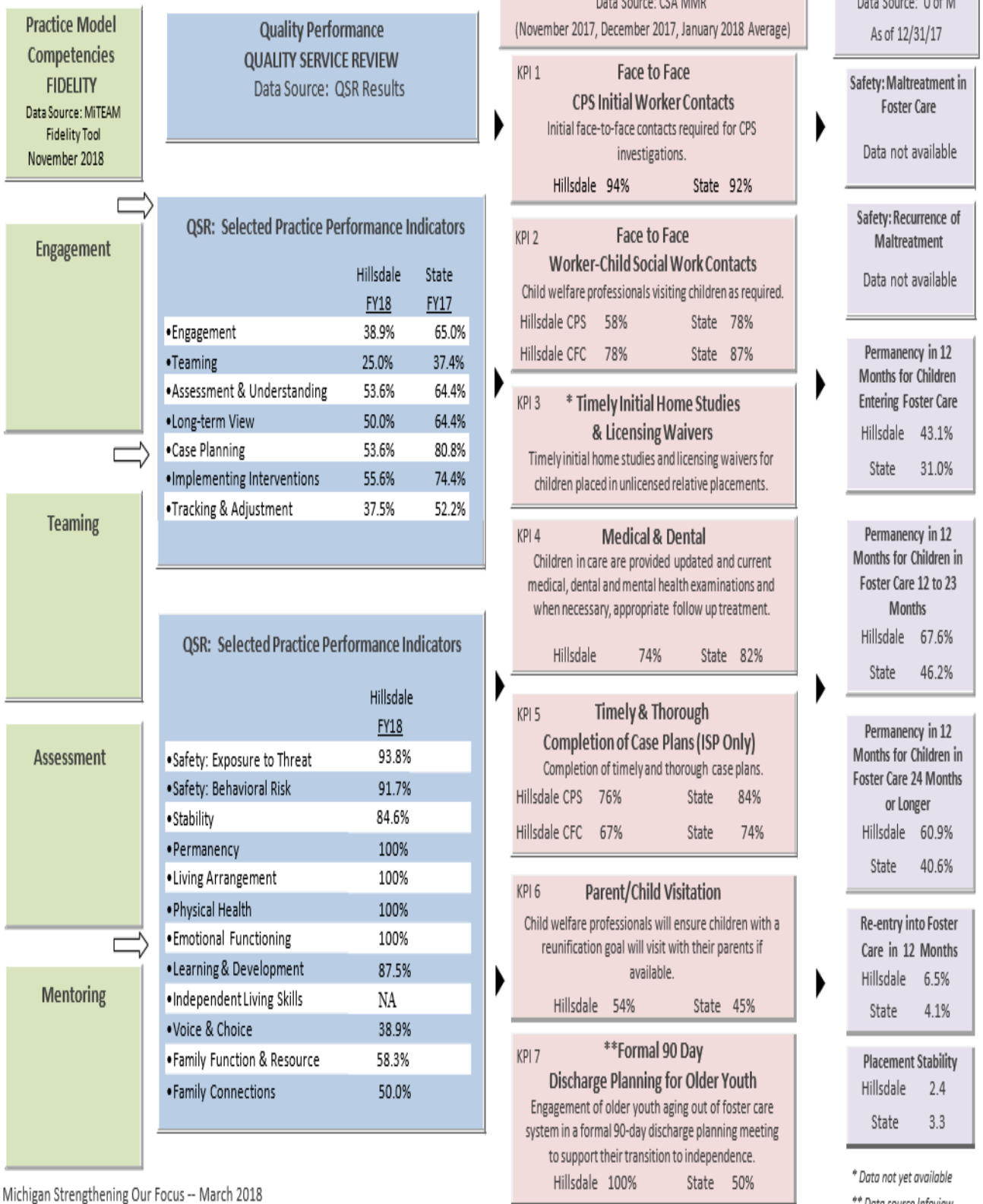
- Statewide information system
- Case review system
- Quality assurance system
- Staff and provider training
- Service array and resource development
- Agency responsiveness to the community
- Foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention

# Measuring and Monitoring Progress - Branch



Michigan Strengthening Our Focus -- March 2018

# Measuring and Monitoring Progress - Hillsdale



The University of Michigan with the collaboration of the MDHHS has developed a monitoring tool. The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Observed Performance dashboard is a useful resource in monitoring county and BSC performance. The dashboard allows users to monitor Michigan's performance on CFSR measures by county and Business Service Center (BSC), on a monthly basis. The dashboard can be found at <http://ssw-datalab.org/project/cfsr-in-michigan/>.

## Next Steps

The child welfare director, in partnership with the child welfare community will utilize the results of the QSR focus groups and practice performance measurements to develop a Practice Improvement Plan (PIP), to address identified areas needing improvement. The BSC director will provide oversight to the county director on the development of the plan, its implementation and tracking of progress. A copy of the final approved plan will be provided to the director of the Division of Continuous Quality Improvement, as well as the executive director of the Children Services Agency.

It is recommended that each county establish a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) team to explore ways to address staff retention and staff training. Branch and Hillsdale County staff performance could benefit from a concentrated training effort aimed at coaching key caseworker activities outlined in Michigan's case practice model. The CQI team could be a resource to outline an action plan for specific enhanced case practice training.

The CQI teams may want to focus their attention in the areas that are immediately impacting case practice such as the following:

- Staff turnover: New workers struggle to engage with families. The teaming process gets delayed while the new worker is learning the facts of the case. Case planning and implementation can be affected, it is important that recommendations and other services do not get overlooked.
- Availability of a range of service providers: There is limited formal collaboration between the agency and service providers. It would be beneficial to develop a group to assist in addressing additional county needs. Additional contracts with more specialized services would assist team members in developing case service plans and implementing the appropriate services. This would decrease the dependency on outside counties for assistance.
- Improving case practice regarding the teaming process: This would ensure that all team members are actively participating in the planning process. All team members should be communicating. This allows for consistency when sharing updates and discussing case challenges. The process allows for parents and children to feel empowered and develop a voice of advocacy. This will assist them in gaining the confidence and knowledge needed for case closure and beyond.

## **Appendix A**

### **Branch County Interviews and Focus Groups**

#### **Individual Stakeholder Interviews**

Individual stakeholder interviews were held with the MDHHS county director, presiding family court judge and prosecuting attorney.

Strengths: Strong collaborations between the entire child welfare communities was identified as a strength. A trust has been established between members and is visible in court proceedings. A strong collaboration with law enforcement is useful especially on the CPS cases.

Workers care about their clients and work hard to ensure they are provided with quality services. Staff members have a lot of knowledge and experience.

The county has good quality foster parents that are very involved in the planning process. Foster parents attend court and participate when needed.

Opportunities for Improvements: Additional resources are needed, including housing and transportation which are the biggest barriers for families. Additional contracts for services providers are needed to allow for more service availability for children and family.

Mental health services for children, especially in crisis is needed. Children have no options if psychiatric services are needed.

Service providers are delayed in providing reports to the workers and court. This process is an opportunity for improvement to ensure the court is receiving the most accurate reflection of the parent's progress.

#### **Focus Groups**

The QSR process allows an opportunity for participants to share their perceptions in individual and focus group interviews. It should be noted that the validity of the statements made during group sessions are not verified by the group facilitators, but rather the information is intended to be an opportunity for further exploration by the county child welfare leadership. Focus groups were conducted with the following groups:

##### **Foster Youth**

A total number of five youth participated and provided feedback in this focus group.

Strengths: A strength identified by all youth was the opportunity to participate in the MYOI group. They explained that it provides support from other peers and opportunities to learn



new things. The group provided an example of the group going to a local car dealership and learning how to change a car's oil.

Most youth agreed that workers visit on a monthly basis. Some workers went above and beyond for the youth participating. Some youth reported participating in the family team meetings explaining that if they did not have appropriate behavior they may not have been included for participation.

Some youth reported that their grades improved after entering care due to more intensive monitoring. Other youth reported they learned more independent skills as a result of entering care. The youth that had been reunified reported improvement within the family due to the contact with the system.

Opportunities for Improvement: Most youth reported that sibling visitation or contact stops when they enter foster care. It was explained that often when the goal changes to adoption, visitations end due to contact no longer being mandatory. All youth agreed that keeping that family connection is very important to them.

Most youth reported issues with schools. Some reported bullying occurring and others talk about rumors and other adolescent concerns. Overall most did not enjoy their school experience. Some youth discussed the school dress code and the limited clothing they are provided presents as a challenge. One student provided an example that she had to put duct tape over the holes in her jeans to meet dress code.

The biggest concern that all the youth discussed was the strict rules that exist once they enter foster care. Sleepovers are not allowed to visit friends and they have restrictions on movies. Youth felt like they were always being punished and stated they are not allowed to have a cell phone while in care.

### **Foster Parents**

Three individuals participated and offered feedback in this focus group. The participants have a history ranging from four to ten years of being licensed foster parent(s).

Strengths: Although located in Calhoun County, many foster parents reported that they utilize the Family Support Center as it is a great resource. They provide trainings and information on ADHD and children's behavioral challenges. They provide day care on Saturday which makes it possible for foster parents to attend training.

Many foster parents reported a variety of retention activities occur throughout the year. The listed Easter egg hunt, Detroit Tiger tickets, zoo tickets, Halloween activities and Santa Claus visits annually.

Foster parents are invited to family team meetings and participate on a regular basis. Foster parents are invited to attend court hearings and can provide a written letter with any input which is forwarded to the judge.

Foster parents report attending all court hearings. The referees are appreciative of the foster parents and acknowledge and thank them during court hearings. However, it was also mentioned that the foster parents do not have the opportunity to talk to the judges.

A wide variety of trainings are provided and useful to foster parents.

Opportunities for Improvement: Staff changes on cases were identified as an opportunity for improvement within the child welfare system. Foster parents reported that worker changes have a significant impact on case practice. Foster parents reported that case workers will listen to your concerns but lack the follow through.

Some foster parents noted there is one assigned Lawyer Guardian Ad Litem (LGAL) in the county. The LGAL does not visit the children in the home, but rather a quick visit occurs prior to court or the foster parents take the children to the LGAL's office. It was reported that the LGAL could improve contact with the children to understand the children's needs.

The foster parents felt that service gaps exist with many services due to services working with biological family members, but the same services would not be provided in the foster home. Examples provided were Early-On and parent aides. The foster parents expressed they felt that Early-On could be a useful resource in their home, but this is not offered. The foster parents reported that parent aides do not actively participate in visitation and fail to provide service within the biological parents' home.

### **MDHHS Child Welfare Supervisors (CPS and Foster Care)**

A total of four individuals participated in this focus group. Two CPS supervisors and two MDHHS foster care supervisors provided feedback in this focus group. The experience within the participants ranged from nine to 20 years.

Strengths: A strength identified by all supervisors was that workers are very knowledgeable and understand the resources and services available for children and families. Overall, supervisors report that families are serviced "well" in their community.

Supervisors reported good collaboration and relationship with the court. Staff feel supported with court personnel. Good communication occurs on a regular basis.

CPS and foster care units are joined and work as one team. Supervisors encourage staff to see the differences between CPS and foster care and ensure that each team supports each other no matter what challenges exist.

Supervisors have a wealth of knowledge and experience. They report being united and model that unity to staff. They describe their role as a leader and mentor. Supervisors report that they care about staff and make themselves available when needed.

Opportunities for Improvement: Supervisors shared an opportunity for improvement being an improved relationship with Community Mental Health (CMH). The child welfare community has limited resources and the dependency on the CMH services play a large role. Steps are being taken to improve the communication and collaboration with CMH.

Service gaps were reported in the areas of substance abuse and outreach services, and a need for formal parenting classes or a support group to provide an outlet for parents to discuss challenges. The lack of services was reported as the biggest challenge for staff.

Supervisors reported struggling with finding a balance between staff providing quality services and still meeting the deadlines and quotas set by management. They reported that spreadsheets can be “overwhelming” and stressful.

### **MDHHS and Private Agency Foster Care Workers/CPS Workers**

A total of nine individuals participated in this focus group. One MDHHS foster care worker, one MYOI worker, six CPS workers and one private agency foster care worker provided feedback in this focus group. The experience within the participants ranged from four months to 10 years.

Strengths: Staff identified the small office as a strength. They stated everyone works together and assist each other when needed. The office environment is “positive.” Workers feel respected by the supervisors. The supervisors provide consistent expectations across all units providing structure to staff.

Another identified strength is the strong relationship described by staff with the court. An example was provided of a local family court judge that will meet with worker and talk with them. Communication with all court personnel was described as “good.” A quick response time response was noted when reaching out to the court or attorneys. A strong coalition against domestic violence exists.

Workers report being dedicated and wanting to provide quality services. Workers are willing to put in time outside of work hours to support the community and volunteer.

Opportunities for Improvement: A challenge for staff is the limited resources available within the small community. Staff reported long waiting list for needed services. A need for mental health services was listed as a top priority.

The drug of choice for parents is methamphetamine and opiates. Limited substance abuse treatment facilities and counselors were reported. Anger management is only available for men, no options for women currently is available.

Housing is the biggest barrier noted for families. There is limited availability and rentals are extremely expensive and average \$850.00 a month. These homes are limited in size and can be difficult for a larger family.

### **Service Providers**

Nine individuals participated and offered feedback in this focus group.

Strengths: Most providers viewed the small size of the county as a strength within the child welfare community because it allows for each provider to network between agencies. This increases the amount of communication each service provider has in the child welfare community. A strong collaboration was described and each agency is willing to assist the other when needed.

Communication between workers and providers occurs on a regular basis through email or phone and has improved. Most providers reported being invited to court and are asked to participate.

All providers are invited and attend the family team meetings. They are asked for their opinions and input and feel like they have a voice.

### Opportunities for Improvement:

Service gaps noted for families were housing, transportation and financial utility assistance. Prevention services were noted as a need.

A need for emergency crisis mental health services and placement were identified as a need. Children are reportedly left at the hospital for days when a placement is not found and then are eventually returned home without intervention occurring.

Additional services for domestic violence victims and batterers are needed. Often families are forced to travel to neighboring counties for these services and without transportation these services cannot be completed.

## **Appendix B**

### **Hillsdale County Interviews and Focus Groups**

#### **Individual Stakeholder Interviews**

Individual stakeholder interviews were held with MDHHS county director, presiding family court judge, family court referee and the prosecuting attorney.

Strengths: All stakeholders interviewed identified a strength as a strong relationship with court personnel and law enforcement. Having a strong relationship leads to good collaboration of cases. Stakeholders saw teaming as a regular occurrence stating the collaboration occurs with the school, court, law enforcement and the agencies on a regular basis.

Another identified strength is that foster parents and service providers are invited to court hearings. Service providers and foster parents attend court on a regular basis.

Opportunities for Improvements: The stakeholders identified the biggest challenge for Hillsdale County is staff turnover. They stated that it is difficult to find qualified staff and explained they would like more cooperation with the local Hillsdale College. The staff shortage leads to court and other reports not being completed timely. Also, hiring new staff equates to more time in training and staff have less time to complete their job duties.

Another identified challenge is the limited option for services which affects the quality of services workers are providing to the children and families. It has been extremely difficult in obtaining the necessary progress reports from the service providers causing delays in court proceedings.

#### **Focus Groups**

The QSR process allows an opportunity for participants to share their perceptions and opinions in individual and focus group interviews. It should be noted that the validity of the statements made during group sessions are not verified by the group facilitators, but rather the information is intended to be an opportunity for further exploration by the county child welfare leadership. Focus groups were conducted with the following groups:

#### **Foster Youth**

A total number of two youth participated and provided feedback in this focus group. The youth were in care for four and five years.

Strengths: MYOI is identified as a strength. The youth are provided a stipend for their participation. It provides an opportunities to learn independent living skills. MYOI provides support from peers and youth attend important events (i.e. college visits or teen conference).

The youth reported that the services they were provided while in care was helpful. The youth participated in individual counseling services and were provided with Youth in Transition (YIT) funds. The youth reported they worked with the same counselor for many years.

Youth reported that they saw their LGAL on a regular basis and attended court hearings. Both youth felt as though they had a voice in their case as they did not want to return home and wanted to remain in care.

Opportunities for Improvement: The youth reported they would like to see more family visitation while in care and thought reunification could happen in a timelier manner. The youth stated they would like to see a support group for foster children. An increase in clothing allowance would also be helpful.

The youth explained that placement can be stressful and stated a visit with the family prior to placement would be helpful in building a relationship and trust. The youth reported they would like to see the foster care workers make more of an effort to get to know the youth. It appears youth feel as though engagement may be lacking.

The youth stated that schools should be aware that youth are in foster care to ensure they understand what the child is experiencing and why the child may have a lengthy school history. Youth thought a program like Big Brother/Big Sister would be an asset to Hillsdale County foster children.

## **Foster Parents**

Eight individuals participated and offered feedback in this focus group. The participants have a history ranging from six to ten years of being licensed foster parent(s).

Strengths: The foster parents stated the greatest strength in Hillsdale County is the MDHHS licensing workers. They stated workers are supportive, go above and beyond, and are “top notch.” The licensing workers assist in finding trainings for the foster parents and provide a training at each support meeting. They provide regular retention activities even though they have a very limited budget.

The county has a Facebook page for foster parents. The foster parents explained that this is a valuable support network and resource for them. All foster parents saw this as extremely helpful. Foster parents are able to ask for advice or needed items and receive responses from others.

Overall, the foster care caseworkers were described as “amazing.” The foster parents explained that they are available at all hours and do not hesitate to answer calls after business hours. Foster parents are notified of all court hearings and are encouraged to provide feedback.

Foster parents are encouraged to be part of the teaming process and invited to family team meetings. Accommodations are made to call in when needed to ensure their participation.

Opportunities for Improvement: The foster parents reported that LGALs do not see their assigned children on a regular basis and some do not even know the child's circumstances. Service gaps were noted in all trauma based services. A lack of psychiatric services leads to children having medication reviews via teleconference, which is described as "impersonal" and "ineffective."

Most foster parents reported having a negative experience with private agencies and stated they do not want to be a borrowed bed. They explained that the quality and circumstances are very different when working with a private agency versus MDHHS. Staff turnover among private agency workers is a barrier. It appears that private agencies have different rules and standards for foster parents than MDHHS.

Payment and reimbursement continues to be a barrier for foster parents. The mileage reimbursement is cumbersome and is not received in a timely manner. Upon intake, foster parents are forced to pay out of pocket for children's clothes, school supplies, shoes and coats and they wait months to receive payments. This can be due to a child's funding source, but many stated the purchase of service (POS) worker is overwhelmed and has too many cases, causing the delays in processing.

### **MDHHS Child Welfare Supervisors (CPS and Foster Care)**

A total of four individuals participated in this focus group. Two CPS supervisors and one MDHHS foster care supervisor and one MDHHS foster care/licensing supervisor provided feedback in this focus group. The experience within the participants ranged from eight to over 30 years.

Strengths: A strength identified by all supervisors was that they work well together, are concerned about outcomes, but genuinely care about children. Supervisors reported that staff support one another and assist with mentoring new staff. Staff have a good rapport and participate in a fellowship by eating lunch together.

Supervisors stated they have a high quality of foster parents. Foster parents are a close group and the county provides a support group. Foster parents are vested in the process and often support the biological parents even after reunification has occurred.

Supervisors have a wealth of knowledge and experience and this is mentored through regular supervision. They report providing one on one monthly supervision to staff. The supervisors meet weekly as a group and have a monthly management meeting with the program manager.

Opportunities for Improvement: Supervisors shared an opportunity for improvement being improving the relationship with the court. No true collaboration was described.

Service gaps were reported in the areas of domestic violence services, batterer's services, transportation and substance abuse treatment. The lack of services was reported as the biggest challenge for staff.

Supervisors reported struggling with finding a balance between staff providing quality services and still meeting the deadlines and quotas set by management. Staff turnover is a huge barrier impacting multiple departments.

### **MDHHS and Private Agency Foster Care Workers/Licensing Workers**

A total of six individuals participated in this focus group. Three MDHHS foster care workers, two MDHHS licensing workers, and one private agency foster care worker provided feedback in this focus group. The experience within the participants ranged from two to ten years.

Strengths: Workers identified teamwork among co-workers as a strength. They explained that during a crisis situation workers will step in to assist however needed. Workers stated they have a unique way of "thinking outside the box" to address child or parent needs.

Another identified strength was the amount and quality of the foster homes in the county. Foster parents are reportedly part of the team and participate in the teaming process. Foster parents are bonded and work as one cohesive group.

Staff reported on-going trainings being available for staff. Most staff who participated in the focus group were within the designated case load size. Staff reported having regular contact with supervision and most felt supported by their assigned supervisors. A good relationship was described with the assigned family court judge. A great relationship with law enforcement was reported.

Opportunities for Improvement: A challenge that workers identified was limited resources available within their community. Service gaps were reported with inpatient substance abuse treatment, emergency mental health services and no preventative or crisis interventions for children. Workers asked for additional trauma based therapists, reconsideration of fictive kin placements and prevention services. Workers stressed the need for drug treatment facilities.

A disconnect was reported by workers between the LGALs and their assigned children. It was alleged that LGALs are not familiar with their assigned case, unprepared for court hearings and engage in inconsistent visitation with their assigned children. LGALs do not engage in the teaming process.

Supervision was described as inconsistent. Each supervisor has a different style and lacks a cohesiveness. Some supervisors can be very helpful when needed and others do not make themselves available.



## **CPS Workers**

Four CPS workers participated in this focus group. The group of participants had a range of experience from three months to three and a half years. The group consisted of both CPS investigators and one on-going worker.

Strengths: Some identified a strength in the child welfare community as good service providers. Family's First was identified as a useful resource. Multisystemic Therapy (MST) is a counseling service provided to at risk youth ages 14-17. All workers agreed that this service was very helpful.

All workers reported feeling supported by their supervisors. Supervisors are available when needed and provide support when asked. Workers have weekly team meeting and monthly staff meetings with the foster care workers.

A strong collaboration with local law enforcement was discussed. The relationship was described as "good" and law enforcement always makes themselves available when needed. Overall, the relationship with court personnel was described as "good." Within the past year some changes have occurred, the county has a new referee and prosecuting attorney.

Opportunities for Improvement: Transportation and housing were identified as a need for families. Workers reported additional preventative services like Families First to assist with category 3 cases would be useful to prevent recurrence.

CPS workers described the first priority is standard of promptness (SOP) but, they do put safety first. All workers were over caseload size due to staff turnover and reported that they are currently unable to meet the job expectations due to their high caseloads. Most workers reported this is a recent change impacting staff. A high volume of assignments and two vacancies were reported to be the main reason for this challenge.

Ongoing trainings are available but workers lack time and must travel to attend. This makes receiving approval difficult. Pre-Service Institute (PSI) training was described as "not helpful." Workers felt additional training for forensic interviewing would be extremely helpful. Per the workers, PSI provides a basic understanding of policy and spends little time learning the skill of forensic interviewing.

## **Service Providers**

Four individuals participated and offered feedback in this focus group.

Strengths: Most providers viewed the communication and relationship between worker and provider as a strength. Service providers stated that MDHHS workers are responsive, even after work hours. A good relationship with court personnel was reported.

The Court Appointed Special Advocate program has been expanded from nine cases to 37 cases. They have a total of 26 volunteers. This is viewed as a useful resource.

Great Start Readiness works well in the public-school setting and is accessible to families with one location to process applications. Play groups are offered within the community for younger children to learn socialization skills and parents to gain support.

Opportunities for Improvement:

Service gaps noted for families were transportation, late visitation hours and locations, emergency shelters and affordable housing.

There is a need for substance abuse treatment, in some cases it seems there must be an arrest to receive substance abuse treatment. Parenting or nurturing father programs are needed as a preventative measure. A lack of batterer programs makes it difficult for workers to service a family involved in a domestic violence situation.

Staff turnover leads to multiple workers being involved in a case. This can be challenging for service providers to contact the appropriate worker. The State Emergency Relief application process is difficult to complete, and decisions are not made timely.

## Appendix C

### Child and Family Status Indicators

\* The following scores reflect only scores that fell in the acceptable (4-6) range.

Category	Item	Branch	Hillsdale
Safety: Exposure to Threats	a. Home	87.5%	100.0%
Safety: Exposure to Threats	b. School	100.0%	80.0%
Safety: Exposure to Threats	c. Other Settings	100.0%	100.0%
Safety: Behavioral Risk	a. Risk to Self	100.0%	100.0%
Safety: Behavioral Risk	b. Risk to Others	100.0%	83.3%
Stability	a. Home	100.0%	87.5%
Stability	b. School	100.0%	80.0%
Permanency	Permanency	83.3%	100.0%
Living Arrangement	Living Arrangement	100.0%	100.0%
Physical Health	Physical Health	100.0%	100.0%
Emotional Functioning	Emotional Functioning	100.0%	100.0%
Learning & Development	a. Early Learning / Development	100.0%	100.0%
Learning & Development	b. Academics	83.3%	75.0%
Independent Living Skills	Independent Living Skills	100.0%	N/A
Voice and Choice	a. Child/Youth	60.0%	100.0%
Voice and Choice	b. Mother	60.0%	33.3%
Voice and Choice	c. Father	50.0%	25.0%
Voice and Choice	d. Caregiver	40.0%	60.0%
Voice and choice	e. Other	50.0%	0.0%
Family Functioning/Resourcefulness	a. Mother	20.0%	57.1%
Family Functioning/Resourcefulness	b. Father	50.0%	75.0%
Family Functioning/Resourcefulness	c. Other	0.0%	0.0%
Family Connections	b. Mother	50.0%	50.0%
Family Connections	c. Father	60.0%	60.0%
Family Connections	d. Siblings	33.3	100.0%
Family Connections	e. Other	0.0%	0.0%

## Practice Performance Indicators

\* The following scores reflect only scores that fell in the acceptable (4-6) range.

Category	Item	Branch	Hillsdale
Engagement	a. Child/Youth	80.0%	100.0%
Engagement	b. Mother	80.0%	33.3%
Engagement	c. Father	50.0%	25.0%
Engagement	d. Caregiver	60.0%	60.0%
Engagement	e. Other	0.0%	0.0%
Teaming	Teaming	25.0%	25.0%
Assessment & Understanding	a. Child/Youth	100.0%	75.0%
Assessment & Understanding	b. Mother	100.0%	42.9%
Assessment & Understanding	c. Father	50.0%	50.0%
Assessment & Understanding	d. Caregiver	80.0%	60.0%
Assessment & Understanding	e. Other	50.0%	0.0%
Long-term View	Long-term View	50.0%	50.0%
Case Planning	a. Child/Youth	100.0%	75.0%
Case Planning	b. Mother	83.3%	42.9%
Case Planning	c. Father	62.5%	50.0%
Case Planning	d. Caregiver	80.0%	60.0%
Case Planning	e. Other	50.0%	0.0%
Implementing Interventions	a. Child/Youth	100.0%	75.0%
Implementing Interventions	b. Mother	66.7%	42.9%
Implementing Interventions	c. Father	37.5%	50.0%
Implementing Interventions	d. Caregiver	80.0%	60.0%
Implementing Interventions	e. Other	50.0%	0.0%
Tracking & Adjustment	Tracking & Adjustment	50.0%	37.5%