

**Minnesota Department of Human Services  
Child and Family Service Review  
County Self Assessment  
Instructions  
Benton County**

**July 2006 (Rev. 7/19/06)**

# **Minnesota Child and Family Service Review**

## **Instructions for Conducting the County Self Assessment**

The purpose of this document is to provide counties a framework for conducting a self assessment of their child welfare system, and to provide a format for documenting the self assessment process and findings.

The guidance is organized as follows:

- Purpose of the county self assessment
- Process for conducting the county self assessment
- Instructions for completing the county self assessment

### **I. Purpose of the County Self Assessment**

The county self assessment is the first phase of the Minnesota Child and Family Service Review. The self assessment process provides the county an opportunity to evaluate strengths and areas needing improvement across eight systemic factors. These systemic factors provide a framework for the delivery of child welfare services and achievement of safety, permanency and well-being outcomes. The county also examines child welfare data to assess the effectiveness of the child welfare system and evaluates performance on six national standard indicators.

The county self assessment process serves two primary functions. First, the self assessment process allows counties to begin identifying systemic strengths and areas needing improvement. The self assessment also provides counties with a method to examine and interpret data related to safety, permanency and well-being performance. These activities provide a basis for carrying out continuous quality improvement efforts.

Second, DHS Quality Assurance staff review the county self assessment and use the information to prepare for the second phase of the review process, the onsite review. Issues raised in the self assessment are further evaluated through case reviews or through targeted questions for community stakeholders.

In addition, information from the county self assessment is shared with other program areas at DHS to inform plans for statewide training, technical assistance, practice guidance and policy development.

The evaluation and subsequent ratings of strength or area needing improvement on each exploratory issue and overall systemic factor are determined by the county and reviewed by DHS Quality Assurance staff. Any questions regarding ratings or descriptions will be discussed with the county. The ratings are included in the self assessment process for the following reasons: they assist the county in targeting future policy or program development efforts and they provide

the state's quality assurance process with quantitative data on systemic strengths and areas needing improvement.

Development of the county Program Improvement Plan is the last phase of the review process. During the onsite phase of the review, some systemic factors may be identified as contributing reasons for rating specific performance items as areas needing improvement. The county will be asked to address these systemic factors in their Program Improvement Plan. The county will not be asked to address systemic factors based solely on the self assessment ratings.

## **II. Process for Conducting the County Self assessment**

Quality Assurance staff provide the county self assessment document and offer guidance on completion of the process at the first coordination meeting held with the county. The self assessment document includes county specific data on national standard performance along with safety and permanency data. The county self assessment is completed and submitted to the Quality Assurance staff approximately two weeks prior to the onsite review.

Quality Assurance staff will give the agency examples of self assessment documents completed by other counties and provide additional technical assistance as requested.

Counties are strongly encouraged to convene a team of representatives of county agency staff and community stakeholders to complete the self assessment process. Children's Justice Initiative Teams, Child Protection Teams or Citizen Review Panels are examples of community stakeholders who play a key role in the overall county child welfare delivery system. These community stakeholders bring a broad and meaningful perspective to the evaluation of systemic factors and performance related to safety, permanency and well-being. Staff members and community stakeholders who participate in the county self assessment process also provide a valuable resource to the development of the county's Program Improvement Plan.

The agency may also consider options such as focus groups with community stakeholders or consumer groups, or consumer surveys as ways to gather information for the self assessment. Connecting the self assessment process to other county needs assessment or planning requirements, such as CCSA, maximizes the use of time and resources to conduct the self assessment.

County self assessment documents are classified as public information and are posted on the child welfare supervisor's website. .

## **III. Instructions for Completing the County Self assessment Document**

### **Part I. General Information**

DHS Quality Assurance staff will identify the period under review. The county is requested to designate a person who will be primarily responsible for completing the self assessment and provide contact information.

## Part II. Systemic Factors

Instructions and guidance for completing the assessment of each exploratory issue and systemic factor are contained in this section of the county self assessment document.

### Systemic Factor Matrix

#### Description of County Practice

Use the exploratory issues to assess and describe the capacity and quality of the county's child welfare system. Describe how the system works, including strengths and promising practices. Each exploratory issue has specific guidance and instructions provided.

#### Exploratory Issue Rating

Each exploratory issue is rated on a numeric scale from 1 to 4. Ratings of 1 and 2 are considered areas needing improvement. Ratings of 3 and 4 are considered strengths.

Determine a rating for each exploratory issue according to the following scale:

Area Needing Improvement		Strength	
1	2	3	4
None of the exploratory issue practices or requirements are in place.	Some, but not all, of the exploratory issue practices or requirements are in place and some function at a lower than adequate level.	Most, but not all, of the exploratory issue practices or requirements are in place and most function at an adequate or higher level.	All of the exploratory issue practices or requirements are in place and all are functioning at an adequate or higher level.

#### Barriers Identified/Initial Plans

Identify barriers to meeting the practices or requirements for each exploratory issue. Include gaps in services, resource issues or other factors that contribute to the rating of area needing improvement. Where applicable describe initial plans the county has for addressing the identified barriers or making systemic improvements.

#### Overall Systemic Factor Rating

Each systemic factor is rated on a numeric scale from 1 to 4. Ratings of 1 and 2 are considered areas needing improvement. Ratings of 3 and 4 are considered strengths.

The overall systemic factor rating for each of the eight systemic factors is determined by computing the average of the ratings for the exploratory issues. Using the "information system" as an example, an overall systemic factor rating of strength or area needing improvement would occur as follows:

In this example, "information system" has four exploratory issues to review. The self assessment indicates that exploratory issue A 1 is rated a 2 (area needing improvement), exploratory issue A 2 is rated a 3 (strength), exploratory issue A 3 is rated a 3 (strength) and exploratory issue A 4 is rated a 4 (strength). The total of

the ratings for all exploratory issues is 12. When the total rating is divided by four the overall systemic factor rating is 3.00, a strength.

### **Part III. Safety and Permanency Data**

Assess the county's performance on national standard indicators. The county will address performance that does not meet national standards in a Program Improvement Plan, so it is helpful to use the county self assessment process to identify and analyze factors affecting performance.

Review and analyze the data tables related to child safety and permanency measures. Compare the county's data to statewide data and examine areas that show significant variation. Where appropriate, note when the data does not appear to adequately reflect the county's performance.

Use any other data available to the county that will contribute to a thorough evaluation of performance related to safety, permanency and well-being.

### **Part IV. Assessment of Safety, Permanency and Well-being Performance**

Based on examination of safety and permanency data provided in Part III, respond to each of the safety, permanency and/or well-being questions. Most questions include recommendations for using SSIS reports and SSIS charting and analysis to aid in the evaluation of safety, permanency and well-being performance.

### **Part V. Assessment of Strengths and Needs**

The first two questions in Part V provide a brief summary of findings from the county self assessment. Summarize systemic and practice strengths as well as areas needing improvement. Identify specific issues that warrant further examination in the onsite review.

The final item in the document is a series of questions used to evaluate the self assessment process. Feedback received in this evaluation is used to make improvement to the self assessment process.

**PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION**

Name of County Agency
Benton County Human Services
Period Under Review
For Onsite Review Sample: November 27 <sup>th</sup> to December 1st Period for Provided Data: September 1, 2005 to November 27, 2006 Other: _____
County Agency Contact Person for the County Self Assessment
Name     Bruce DeGrote Title:    Social Service Supervisor Address: Benton County Human Services PO Box 740 Foley, MN 56329  Phone:    ( 320 ) 968-5087                      Fax: ( 320 ) 968-5330
E-Mail: bdegrote@co.benton.mn.us

## PART II: SYSTEMIC FACTORS

### A. Information System (SSIS)

Use the following exploratory issues to assess and describe the capacity and quality of the county’s use of the Social Service Information System (SSIS). Describe how the system works, including strengths and promising practices. Identify barriers to an effective system and initial plans to address barriers.

**A 1. Exploratory Issue: Has the county developed policies or protocols regarding the use of SSIS? Examples might include policies related to maintaining an electronic or paper file, requirements regarding content of case notes, timing of client and collateral contact documentation, or development of “naming conventions” as a method of monitoring activity.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p>The agency uses the policies set forth by SSIS and also policies unique to Benton County, such as confidentiality, time requirements, purging policies, and dictation policies. Benton County Human Services follows the county policy of maintaining an offsite electronic file of all SSIS files.</p>	1	2	3	4 X	<p>Although still a strength, Improvements could be made in consistency of time entry and quality of case notes in each file.</p>

**A 2. Exploratory Issue: How does the county plan and provide for resources to support the use and effectiveness of SSIS? Describe county resources available for operation of SSIS such as: process for training new social workers and providing ongoing training; does the county have an SSIS mentor and how does that role support utilization of SSIS; how does supervisory and management staff support SSIS use; and, is there a plan for ongoing replacement/upgrade of software and/or equipment?**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p><b>The office support supervisor is the SSIS mentor and coordinator. An Information Systems Specialist is the Alternate mentor and a second Information Specialist is an Alternate Coordinator. All three attend SSIS mentor/coordinator meetings 75% of the time. Together they share in the training of SSIS users. The Agency promotes direct training of as many staff as possible when there are new hires and when there are new SSIS version releases. The mentor/coordinator and the alternates are always available to help SSIS users with direct help. Project updates are shared with SSIS users and new procedures are demonstrated to staff at unit meetings. The county has a replacement plan for computers facilitated and funded by the Information Systems Department.</b></p>	1	2	3	4	
				X	

**A 3. Exploratory Issue: How does supervisory staff utilize SSIS as a management tool? Consider the following in your response: Has the supervisor received SSIS training for managers; does the supervisor use SSIS for case oversight, to access individual cases, general reports and outcome charts to aid in supervision; has the supervisor established clear expectations for social service staff use and competencies related to SSIS; does the supervisor consider use of SSIS in the evaluation of social worker staff performance?**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p><b>SSIS is used as a management tool. The Social Worker Supervisors are familiar with its use. General reports are used to monitor time reporting, contact with clients and case plans. SSIS reports are used as part of performance reviews. Charting and Analysis is used when giving reports to the Director and County Commissioners.</b></p>	1	2	3	4	
				X	

**A 4. Exploratory Issue: Assess and describe any current practice or program issues related to SSIS. Consider specific needs for training or technical assistance.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p>SSIS is generally running smoothly. The DHS help desk and mentor meetings are helpful. DHS staff are also available when problems occur. However, the amount of information that currently needs to be entered into SSIS is quite overwhelming when managing a time intensive case load. Currently our SSIS workgroup is meeting weekly as we implement SSIS Fiscal.</p>	1	2	3	4 X	<p>Our Agency will need to continue to discuss and strategize as to how SSIS information can be entered accurately and timely and still allow social workers adequate time to see families.</p>

Overall Systemic Factor Rating for Information System			
(Determine the overall systemic factor rating based on ratings of the preceding exploratory issues)			
Area Needing Improvement		Strength	
1	2	3	4 X

## B. Case Review System

Use the following exploratory issues to assess and describe the capacity and quality of the county’s case review system. Describe how the system works, including strengths and promising practices. Identify barriers to an effective system and initial plans to address barriers.

**B 1. Exploratory Issue: How does the county ensure that each child in foster care has a current written case plan with all the required content elements? Include consideration of how the case plan reflects a family centered approach, system for measuring compliance with case planning requirements, and quality and effectiveness of case planning. Minnesota Statutes, section 260C.212, subdivision 1.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p>State requirements for case plans are followed. All efforts are made to have the case plan completed within 30 days. In addition, Child Protection and Out of Home Placement Plans are reviewed and signed by the supervisor. This is also monitored by the Supervisor through SSIS general reports by the supervisor.</p>	1	2	3	4	
				X	

**B 2. Exploratory Issue: How does the county ensure that parents and children in foster care participate in developing the child’s case plan? Consider participation in activities such as identifying strengths and needs, determining goals, requesting specific services and evaluating progress related to their children. Discuss policies and practices to engage families in case planning and methods for engaging both parents, custodial and non-custodial, in case planning. Minnesota Statutes, section 260C.212, subdivision 1, (b) (3).**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p>Children, Parents, foster parents and other Key professionals and family members are invited to participate in development of the case plan. SDM Strengths and Needs tool is utilized in helping with the discussion. Family Group Decision Making is occasionally utilized as a tool to explore all possible service and support options. Social workers frequently discuss case plan development at the weekly unit meeting. Occasionally, cases are brought to the Benton County Case Consultation Team for review. This process is monitored by the supervisor in both case reviews and through SSIS.</p>	1	2	3	4 X	<p>Improvements can be made in consistency that all plans are of high quality and timely.</p>

**B 3. Exploratory Issue: How does the county meet the requirement to develop an independent living plan for every child age 16 or older who is in placement as a result of a permanency disposition? Describe how the agency ensures that the independent living plan is developed with input of the child and includes all required components. Discuss methods used by the agency to monitor compliance with this requirement. Minnesota Statutes, section 260C. 212, subdivision 1, b (8) (i-vii).**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p>The Supervisor shares SELF information with all social workers and reminds them of the need for an Independent Living Plan for all youth age 16 or older who are in Out of Home Placement because of a permanency option. The “Best Practices Guide for Helping Youth Transition from Out of Home Care to Adulthood” is helpful to social workers in considering best practice ideas.</p>	1	2	3	4 X	<p>Additional efforts could be made in facilitating Independent Living Planning for eligible youth. In some cases, the Independent living plan lacks detail and additional efforts could be made to refer to SAIL programming.</p>

**B 4. Exploratory Issue: How does the county provide for the requirement that the status of each child in foster care is reviewed at least every 6 months, by a court or by administrative review? Discuss policies and practice for conducting reviews and methods for ensuring that reviews are held within required timeframes. Minnesota Statutes, section 260C.212, subdivision 7 (a).**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p><b>Court reviews are scheduled every three month’s or more often as needed, through a joint effort by the Court System, County Attorney’s office and the Agency. These 90 day reviews are scheduled at the time of the hearing, so that all parties are aware of the next review date before they leave the Courts Facilities Building. In the few cases where 90 day court reviews are not held (permanent foster care/voluntary placement), the social workers are aware of the need for an administrative review. A financial worker attached to our Children’s Services Unit helps coordinate the Administrative Reviews.</b></p>	1	2	3	4	<p><b>At times, court reports could be filed more timely.</b></p>
				X	

**B 5. Exploratory Issue: How does the county meet the requirement that permanency hearings for children in care occur within prescribed timeframes? Discuss the effectiveness of these hearings in promoting timely and appropriate achievement of permanency goals for children. Minnesota Statutes, section 260C.201, subdivision 11 (a) and subdivision 11a (a).**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p><b>This “permanency hearing requirement” is a frequent topic of discussion in our Benton County System. At times, our court has set a permanency hearing date at the time of the initial dispositional hearing. Currently that is not happening. This issue will again be discussed at a CJI meeting. However, social workers are very aware of the permanency timelines and do an excellent job of reviewing these cases at our weekly unit meeting. Team decisions are made as to when the permanency pleadings should be filed (within the prescribed timelines). Two workers jointly manage the placement cases in which we have identified a poor prognosis for reunification. The primary case manager will review the plan with the family weekly, with plan revisions being made as necessary and the plan being formally reviewed on a quarterly basis. The concurrent planning worker will review full disclosure and discuss permanency placement options with the family every month and make revisions to the permanency plan as needed.</b></p>	1	2	3	4 X	<p><b>Ideally, permanency hearing dates will be set at the initial dispositional hearing.</b></p>

**B 6. Exploratory Issue: How does the county meet the requirement to provide foster parents, pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers of children in foster care with notice of and opportunity to be heard in any review or hearing held with respect to the child in their care? Minnesota Rules of Juvenile Protection, Rule 22.02 Subdivisions 1 and 2.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
	1	2	3	4	
<p>Foster parents, pre-adoptive parents and relative care givers all receive notices from the Benton County Court Administrator of up coming court hearings. They also receive verbal notices from the social worker. Transportation needs are discussed so that this is not a barrier. The court gives these individuals an opportunity to be heard.</p>				X	<p>Some issues need to be resolved regarding notification to foster parents. We need to develop a better system to notify court administration when the child has moved to a new foster home so that court administration can send notices to the current provider.</p>

**B 7. Exploratory Issue: Does the agency participate in a Children’s Justice Initiative Team? Discuss the functions of the team related to improving and monitoring the agency’s case review system. Describe the characteristics of the Children’s Justice**

Initiative Team, particularly applicable to agency planning and operations that help achieve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes.

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
	1	2	3	4	
Benton County Human Services participates on the Benton County CJI team. The Team was developed in February 2004. Initially we met monthly and currently we meet every other month. The efforts of the Team have led to better communication and improved understanding between all participants. The Team has developed a list of issues to address, such as records disclosure and communication with GAL's. The Team also invites providers to make presentations about new programs.				X	Although the Team has had accomplishments in improving the system, we may at times struggle in maintaining a focus due to membership changes.

Overall Systemic Factor Rating for Case Review System (Determine the overall systemic factor rating based on ratings of the preceding exploratory issues)			
Area Needing Improvement		Strength	
1	2	3	4 X

### C. Quality Assurance System

Use the following exploratory issues to assess and describe the capacity and quality of the county’s quality assurance system. Describe how the system works, including strengths and promising practices. Describe barriers to an effective system and initial plans to address barriers.

**C 1. Exploratory Issue:** Describe the agency’s process for carrying out reviews of the case record. Discuss the agency’s internal case review system including description of any standardized process or tools. Discuss how the process for case record review ensures compliance with child protection rules and statutes.

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p>The Supervisor discusses all Child Protection Services cases with social workers on an as needed basis. In addition, the supervisor participates in the weekly child protection unit meetings for case consultation. The supervisor reviews all assessment/investigation final reports. The supervisor reviews all Child Protection case plans and Out of Home Placement Plans. In addition, the supervisor reviews one file monthly from each case manager for compliance. The DHS External Review Checklist is used as a Tool. All files are sent to the supervisor before being closed to assure proper closing procedure. The supervisor also views cases on SSIS as needed and uses General Reports to monitor progress.</p>	1	2	3	4 X	<p>Finding time to accomplish all of these case record reviews at times is difficult.</p>

**C 2. Exploratory Issue: Does the agency have a process for reviewing child maltreatment screening decisions, track assignments (Family Assessment/Investigation) and maltreatment assessments? Describe how the review process is designed to examine agency practices and decisions related to child safety outcomes. Describe how the agency utilizes results of these reviews to improve future practice and decisions.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p><b>Benton County Human Services utilizes a four person screening team; Child Protection supervisor, intake worker and two assessment workers. Our intake workers are skilled and experienced in determining how immediate the response needs to be. On reports where immediate response is necessary, she will assemble an immediate screening team meeting. The screening team reviews the report, determines which assessment worker is assigned and discusses a strategy for the investigation. Often times the supervisor is available. If not, the Team makes independent decisions to ensure that we have an immediate response and the child(ren) is safe. In cases that may require a less urgent response, or may be screened out, the intake worker routes the intake assessment summary to the four screeners. The screeners write on the intake summary what they believe to be the appropriate screening disposition and why. For those screened out intakes, they are simply routed back to the intake worker who sends the letter to the mandated reporter. For those intakes that are screened in, the intake summary report goes to the supervisor who assigns the case. For those intakes in which we may have a debate, a formal screening meeting is immediately held and the Team decides, or a supervisory decision is made.</b></p>	1	2	3	4	

**C 3. Exploratory Issue: Does the supervisor conduct regularly scheduled, structured supervisory conferences with the child protection social workers? Describe how supervisory conferences are designed to examine issues related to safety, permanency and well-being outcomes. How does the agency utilize results of these conferences to improve future practices?**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p><b>Child Protection Unit meetings are held each week, with all child protection staff, our child foster care licensing worker and a financial worker attached to our unit attending. The primary function is two fold. Assessment workers review cases and make Team determinations on traditional investigations. On-going case managers review cases for case consultation purposes. In addition, unit meetings provide social workers support and best-practice ideas. Policy and Procedures are also discussed along with time for occasional presentations from community providers. The supervisor also meets monthly individually with each social worker to review cases and discuss any “best practice” questions or concerns.</b></p>	1	2	3	4	

**C 4. Exploratory Issue: Does the agency have a pre-placement and/or treatment screening process with the capacity to conduct comprehensive review of children in out-of-home placement or at risk of out-of-home placement? How is this process utilized to improve future practice? Describe the agency’s process as it applies to helping achieve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p><b>Benton County Human Services is able to conduct pre-placement meetings on a very timely, as needed basis. The social workers consult with the supervisor for all placement decisions. In addition, every placement decision is reviewed at our weekly unit meeting or at an impromptu team meeting. Other staff and community professionals (Gal, County Attorney, etc.) are at times invited to these meetings. SDM tools (safety assessment and reunification safety assessment) are used to help with placement decisions. Permanency, safety and well-being of the child are also considered.</b></p>	1	2	3	4	
				X	

**C 5. Exploratory Issue: Describe the agency’s overall quality assurance system. Include discussion on the capacity of the quality assurance system to evaluate the adequacy and quality of child and family services. Describe the capacity of the quality assurance system to collect and produce information and how the information is used to improve future practices.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
	1	2	3	4	
Every two years the CSSA process is conducted in the county. We take this opportunity to evaluate programs, evaluate policy and procedures, identify barriers to services and identify un-met needs in the community. Informally we ask our Benton County child protection case consultation team and Benton-Stearns child protection Team to make suggestions as to system improvement. The development of the CJI action plan was also a helpful quality assurance tool.				X	

Overall Systemic Factor Rating for Quality Assurance System (Determine the overall systemic factor rating based on ratings of the preceding exploratory issues)			
Area Needing Improvement		Strength	
1	2	3	4 X

## D. Staff and Provider Training

Use the following exploratory issues to assess and describe the capacity and quality of the county’s staff and provider training system. Describe how the system works, including strengths and promising practices. Identify barriers to an effective system and initial plans to address barriers.

**D 1. Exploratory Issue: How does the agency provide for training needs of child protection staff that includes the basic skills and knowledge required for their positions? Describe pre-service and in-service training offered or required by the agency including how the agency meets requirements for MCWTS Core Training within six months of employment. Minnesota Statutes, section 626.559 and section 626.5591.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p>All Child Protection Services social workers complete CORE training. In addition, assessment workers complete either Corner House or First Witness training. Recently we were able to have an assessment worker complete the Advanced Corner House Child Sexual Abuse Forensic Interview Training. All Child Protection Services workers attend ITV trainings and out of county trainings as time and funding permit. In addition, new Child Protection staff meets weekly with the supervisor for orientation, training and case consultation time.</p>	1	2	3	4 X	<p>Our orientation for new workers could be improved by having better written policy and procedures and better organization of forms and resource materials.</p>

**D 2. Exploratory Issue: Does the agency work in cooperation with the MCWTS Area Training Manager to conduct Individualized Training Needs Assessments at least once every two years? Describe how the agency meets the requirement for developing staff training plans and how the agency ensures that the plans are carried out. Include discussion on how the agency supports staff training needs through planning and budget. Minnesota Statutes, section 626.559, subdivision 1 and Minnesota Rules Part 9560.0234, Subpart 3.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p>Benton County Human Services works closely with the area training manager to keep staff informed of training opportunities. The training manager annually attends one of our unit meetings. Recently we discontinued the use of the ITNALS and developed an approach of simply reviewing our training needs as a Team, and then working with the training manager to offer that training in our Benton County (St. Cloud Area). The supervisor reviews training needs/goals with each social worker at their annual performance review.</p>	1	2	3	4 X	<p>Specialized training at times is difficult to find (Adoption Case Manager) Minor Parent, Truancy etc.</p>

**D 3. Exploratory Issue: How does the agency evaluate the quality and effectiveness of staff training? How is staff training linked to the agency's system for quality assurance and continuous quality improvement?**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p>As time permits Social workers discuss their training with the supervisor and also share their training knowledge at CP unit meetings. Our Agency focuses on a team atmosphere. As a result, training knowledge is informally transferred to all team members as a result of our frequent and regular team meetings.</p>	1	2	3	4 X	<p>Possible a formal means for social workers to share what they've learned may be more effective. However, finding time to do so may be difficult.</p>

**D 4. Exploratory Issue: How does the agency provide for the pre-service and in-service training needs of foster and adoptive parents and providers? Discuss specifically the agency’s experience with hosting or supporting participation of prospective foster and adoptive families in the MCWTS Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Training. Describe the methods for delivering training, content and type of training. Include discussion on how the agency supports provider training needs through planning and budget. Minnesota Statutes, section 260C.215, subdivision 6 (3).**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p><b>Pre-service training is conducted by the licensor on an individual basis. New Provider trainings are provided on a group basis when participant numbers allow, otherwise this is also done on an individual basis. Information about upcoming training opportunities in the central Minnesota area is given to our providers on a regular basis. MCWTS has also provided trainings to our Central Minnesota providers. Our licensor works closely with Licensors in our neighboring counties to coordinate the MCWTS trainings. Benton County Human Services regularly sponsors SIDS, Shaken Baby and Car Seat training. Child Care Choices and the Minnesota Kinship Caregivers Association also provides trainings.</b></p>	1	2	3	4  X	

**D 5. Exploratory Issue: How does the agency evaluate the quality and effectiveness of provider training? How is provider training linked to the agency's efforts for quality assurance and continuous quality improvement?**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
The licensing worker attends the trainings and conducts informal and formal evaluations. The licensor worker also conducts one to one trainings and has the opportunity to first hand assess the effectiveness of trainings.	1	2	3	4 X	

Overall Systemic Factor Rating for Staff and Provider Training (Determine the overall systemic factor rating based on ratings of the preceding exploratory issues)			
Area Needing Improvement		Strength	
1	2	3	4 X

**E. Service Array and Resource Development for 1) pre-placement prevention, 2) reunification, and 3) permanency services.**

**Use the following exploratory issues to assess and describe the capacity and quality of the county's service array and resource development system. Describe how the system works, including strengths and promising practices. Identify barriers to an effective system, including gaps in services, and initial plans to address barriers.**

**E 1. Exploratory Issue: Describe the primary service array provided by the agency to prevent removal of children from their homes, ensure safe and timely reunification, and help children achieve permanent plans when reunification is not an option. Include descriptions of practice related to placement prevention, reunification and/or other permanency plans.**

**Examine the county's permanency data on foster care population, reasons for entering foster care, foster care re-entries, time to achieve reunification, and time to achieve adoption in assessing the effectiveness of the agency's service array, resources and practices designed to prevent placements, and achieve reunification or other permanency plans.**

**Specifically assess agency policies and/or practices related to the following programs and service areas, and describe the impact on agency efforts to prevent placements, and achieve reunification or other permanency plans: Family Assessment (formerly Alternative Response), Family Group Decision Making, Concurrent Permanency Planning, relative search, and visitation between parents and children in foster care.**

**E 1 (a). Describe the primary service array provided by the agency to prevent removal of children from their homes. Include descriptions of practice related to placement prevention.**

Description of Service Array/Resources/ Practices (Placement Prevention)	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p><b>Benton County has a wide array of family centered, culturally responsive services, including: parent education and support, respite care, out patient mental health evaluations, counseling, mental health screenings for children, Chemical Dependency evaluations, in-patient care, out-patient treatment programs, Public Health Nursing services, WIC, In-Home Family Counseling and Skills programs, Kids First intensive Early Childhood Program, Crisis Nursery, Family Group Decision Making, Bridge Interpreter services, Tri-Cap transportation services and many informal supports through community organizations and churches. Benton County, together with Stearns, Sherburne and Wright counties applied for and received a multimillion dollar grant, which has formed STARS for Children’s Mental Health. STARS is in the process of developing several services which will greatly improve services for children. These services include a mobile crisis team, crisis beds, specialized respite homes, parent support groups and improved access to psychological assessments. Specialized training for all providers are also being planned on a variety of topics including wraparound, evidence based practices and family driven care.</b></p>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>  <b>X</b>	<p><b>At times the availability of In-Home Therapy/Skills has become a problem. This is partially due to the complications of working with the insurance and PMAP programs and partially due to the lack of skilled providers. We will continue to work with our network of in-home providers to improve their availability and skill level.</b></p>

**E 1 (b). Describe the primary service array provided by the agency to achieve safe and timely reunification. Include descriptions of practice related to achieving reunification.**

Description of Service Array/Resources/ Practices (Reunification)	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
	1	2	3	4	
<p>Many of the services listed in E1(a) are also utilized for reunification. In addition, PATH and the YMCA provided supervised visitation services. At times we include Kids First programming at the visit to offer a Therapeutic component. We contract for parent capacity assessments to ensure that our services are targeted to the needs of the parents and assess whether the parents have the capacity to safely and successfully parent. At times we have utilized whole family foster care for minor parents and their child(ren).</p>				X	Same as E1(a)

**E 1 (c). Describe the primary service array provided by the agency to achieve permanency plans when reunification is not an option. Include descriptions of practice related to achieving permanency.**

Description of Service Array/Resources/ Practices (Permanency)	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p><b>Permanency is explained to families who have a child in placement. Families view the CJI video regarding the CHIPS process. If a child in placement has not been reunified within 30 days a concurrent planning social worker is assigned to the case, in addition to the primary case manager. The concurrent planning worker reviews full disclosure and permanent placement options with the family on a regular (monthly) basis. The Agency believes that this use of two social workers sharing the concurrent planning responsibility is an effective way of providing this case management service.</b></p>	1	2	3	4	
				X	

**E 2. Exploratory Issue: Describe the agency’s implementation of Structured Decision Making and how it is used to support placement prevention, timely and safe reunification, or achievement of other permanent plans. Assess how the application of Structured Decision Making tools is used to guide case planning and assess provision of services. Discuss how Structured Decision Making accomplishes: 1) structure and consistency to critical decision points, 2) increased consistency and validity of decision making, 3) targeted resources to families most at risk, and 4) improved effectiveness of child protection services. Include a discussion of which Structured Decision Making basic components/tools are being utilized and how they are being applied to both Family Assessment and investigation child protection cases.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
SDM is used from the intake/assessment phase and throughout the entire life of the case. We regularly talk about the SDM tools for the family at our weekly unit meeting, or when we are making team placement decisions.	1	2	3	4	
				X	

**E 3. Exploratory Issue: Describe the availability and accessibility of services offered. For example, are services community-based and consistent with the language and culture of families being served? Identify barriers to service availability and accessibility such as, geographic location, waiting lists, fees, or transportation.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
	1	2	3	4	
As stated in E1, there is a large array of services in our community. Although our county continues to have a rather small minority population (4%) we do serve families from many cultures (Native American, Hispanic, African American, Asian). At times it is a challenge to find a service provider of the same culture as the family. However, our service providers are open to adapting their service to the culture of the family they are serving. We have transportation services available to make services accessible.				X	Recently, we have begun to experience a lack of qualified experienced in-home providers. We will continue to work with our network of in-home providers to improve their availability and skill level.

Overall Systemic Factor Rating for Service Array and Resource Development (Determine the overall systemic factor rating based on ratings of the preceding exploratory issues)			
Area Needing Improvement		Strength	
1	2	3	4 X



**F 2. Exploratory Issue: Describe the agency’s process or procedures for seeking consumer/client input and including the input in plans for organizational or systemic improvement? Discuss any current or planned activity.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
The CSSA planning process invites community input from consumers/clients.	1	2	3	4	
				X	

**F 3. Exploratory Issue: Describe the agency’s Child Protection Team. Include discussion of the characteristics of the Child Protection Team, such as primary functions and membership particularly applicable to helping achieve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes. Minnesota Statutes, section 626.558.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p><b>We have two child protection Teams. We partner with Stearns County in an effort to provide mandatory reporting training and therapy/intervention training to professionals in the community. The Stearns-Benton Child Protection Team meets 10 times a year. In addition we have a Benton County Case Consultation Team that meets monthly. Case managers or community members are able to present cases for suggestions and support from the Team. Both Teams have active participation from Team members.</b></p>	1	2	3	4 X	

**F 4. Exploratory Issue:** When applicable, describe the membership and activity of the county-based Child Abuse Prevention Council, organized and operating according to state law and policy. Describe how the council meets the statutory requirement to submit a plan for the prevention of child abuse that includes an assessment and rank ordering of needed programs and services. Discuss how this information is incorporated and used in the agency’s planning and operations to achieve improved safety, permanency and well-being outcomes. Minnesota Statutes, section 119A.14.

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p>Benton participates in the St. Cloud Area Child Abuse Prevention Council. The council meets all statutory requirements in submitting their annual plan and activity report. The council has a number of public education/outreach strategies regarding “Never Leaving Kids in Cars”. This promotion has sent brochures about “Never leaving Children in Cars” to business’s when parents may utilize this information. In addition, a local grocery store promoted the “Never Leave kids in cars” ad on their grocery bags. In addition, they can council promoted the “Blue Ribbon” campaign during April Child Abuse Prevention Month. Also the Council sponsored a Love and Logic training for parents.</p>	1	2	3	4	
				X	

**F 5. Exploratory Issue: Describe any children’s mental health or family services collaboratives that operate according to state law and policy? Briefly describe characteristics of the collaboratives, particularly applicable to agency planning and operations that help achieve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p><b>The Benton County Children’s Mental Health Collaborative is made up of families, schools and community organizations. They combine prevention and intervention efforts and resources to improve the quality of life for families and children, by offering support for the mental health needs of children up to the age of 18.</b></p>	1	2	3	4	
				X	

**F 6. Exploratory Issue: How does the agency ensure compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act, including the requirement for determining if a child is American Indian? Discuss any policy or procedures the agency has developed to implement requirements. Minnesota Statutes, section 260C.215, subdivision 6 (i) (6) (b), Minnesota Statutes, section 260.761, subdivisions 1-7.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p><b>Compliance with ICWA is a priority. Active efforts are made to determine if a child receiving services is American Indian. Proper notification is given to the tribal Agency. The tribal social workers are invited to participate in planning meeting and we welcome their recommendations and assistance. All Social Workers receive ICWA training and ICWA is frequently discussed/reviewed at our unit meetings.</b></p>	1	2	3	4 X	<p><b>At times we have experienced slow or no response from tribal social services. Also, frequent turnover of tribal social service staff has made case coordination difficult.</b></p>

**F 7. Exploratory Issue: Has the agency assessed the need for any specialized or ongoing training relative to cultural diversity? Describe any training that has been offered and/or planned in the agency.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
	1	2	3	4	
We regularly assess the need for cultural training and provide such trainings as needed. We annually have a one day retreat where at times we have brought in speakers about cultural issues (Somalian, Asian). Social workers are also encouraged to participate in cultural trainings when they attend conferences (MSSA and St. Louis Co.) Recently, Stars for Children’s Mental Health (funded by a four County grant) has formed a cultural competency workgroup aimed at actively recruiting minority group members to promote and initiate culturally sensitive treatments including training to case managers on cultural issues.				X	

Overall Systemic Factor Rating for Agency Responsiveness to the Community (Determine the overall systemic factor rating based on ratings of the preceding exploratory issues)			
Area Needing Improvement		Strength	
1	2	3	4 X

## G. Foster and Adoptive Home Licensing, Approval and Recruitment

Use the following exploratory issues to assess and describe the capacity and quality of the agency’s system for foster and adoptive home licensing, approval and recruitment. Describe how the system works, including strengths and promising practices. Identify barriers to an effective system and initial plans to address barriers.

**G 1. Exploratory Issue: How does the agency ensure adequacy of foster and adoptive family resources. Describe the foster and adoptive home resources available including any plans related to improving the status of resources, such as efforts to recruit for sibling group placements or placements for children with special needs. Further describe resources, including staff, available to meet the needs of foster and adoptive family licensing, approval and recruitment. Minnesota Statutes, section 260C. 215, subdivision 1.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p>The recruiting of foster and adoptive family resources can be difficult. However, we have a small group, (15 families) of very devoted and qualified foster/adoption homes. Multiple efforts have been made to recruit new homes including ads, radio shows, fair booths, letters to editor and personal invitation. We license new homes regularly. However, we also lose homes periodically due to a variety of reasons. The result being that we consistently maintain about the same number of homes. In addition to our county child foster/adoption homes, we have a number of professional foster home agencies that license homes in the St. Cloud Area. These professional homes help ensure that we have adequate foster/Adoption family resources.</p>	1	2	3	4 X	<p>We do a good job with the time that we have to devote to recruiting. It would simply be nice to have more time.</p>

**G 2. Exploratory Issue: Does the agency’s foster and adoptive home licensing, approval and recruitment system have the capacity for recruiting foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children who are in need of foster and adoptive homes? Describe any activities and/or goals related to recruitment of ethnic and racially diverse families. Minnesota Statutes, section 260C.215, subdivision 1 and Minnesota Statutes, section 260C. 215, subdivision 6 (2).**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
	1	2	3	4	
Contacts have been made with the St. Cloud State University Minority Studies Program and Women’s Studies Program in an effort to recruit and welcome individuals of all ethnic, racial and cultural background to foster/adoption care. For ICWA cases, tribally licensed foster homes are used when possible.				X	More time could be given to continue to develop these contacts and partnerships in the community.

Overall Systemic Factor Rating for Foster and Adoptive Home Licensing, Approval and Recruitment (Determine the overall systemic factor rating based on ratings of the preceding exploratory issues)			
Area Needing Improvement		Strength	
1	2	3	4 X

## H. Supervisor and Social Worker Resources

Use the following exploratory issues to assess and describe the capacity and quality of the agency’s supervisor and social worker staff. Describe how the system works, including strengths and promising practices. Identify barriers to an effective system and initial plans to address barriers.

**H 1. Exploratory Issue: Assess and describe the organizational structure of the agency’s children and family services. Discuss how the organizational structure is conducive to the achievement of safety, permanency and well-being outcomes and to the agency’s continued quality improvement efforts.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p><b>Our social service unit consists of our director, three social service supervisors and 27 social workers (24 full-time – 3 part-time). The Child Protection Unit consists of eight social workers. One worker is our primary intake worker for all program areas. Two workers share the traditional investigation and Family Assessments, and manage a few Family Assessment cases. Three social workers manage traditional child protection cases. One person manages concurrent planning/adoption cases. One person manages truancy/minor parent cases. A half time worker recruits, licenses and maintains child foster homes. Case loads primarily include mandatory child protection cases, with frequent CHIPS actions.</b></p>	1	2	3	4	
				X	

**H 2. Exploratory Issue: Assess and describe the (1) supervisor to staff ratio, (2) caseload/workload size and composition for social workers and (3) the average number of child protection assessments completed per worker. Include discussion on how caseload size affects social worker practice and delivery of services.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p><b>Currently we have adequate staff resources to meet the child welfare needs of Benton County residents. However, each of the workers manage very active case loads with families of high or Intensive Risk. Case loads simply do not allow us to provide child welfare services voluntarily to clients as the Agency had in the past. Case loads primarily consist of mandatory child protection cases, which frequently include CHIPS action.</b></p>	1	2	3	4	
				X	

**H 3. Exploratory Issue: Assess and describe the experience and education level of current supervisor and social work staff. Discuss agency requirements for education and/or experience for supervisors and social workers.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
<p>The child protection unit supervisor has a BA in Psychology with 22 years of County Child Protection experience, 20 years in Benton County. The Mental Health/Chemical Dependency unit supervisor is a licensed psychologist with 19 years of county social work experience, all in Benton County. The Adult Service unit (Licensing) supervisor has 24 years of County experience with 19 years being at Benton County. OF our 27 social workers, average longevity is 6.25, of our eight social workers in our child protection unit, average longevity is 4.25. All staff meet Merit requirements and the standards of the Agency. Three social workers have their Masters Degrees and others are working towards an advanced degree. We are fortunate to have a partnership with SCSU, St. John's and St. Ben's. We regularly have student interns that bring energy and knowledge to our Team. In addition, we have the three colleges close by which makes it convenient for those interested to pursue an advanced degree.</p>	1	2	3	4	

**H 4. Exploratory Issue: Assess and describe the agency’s experience with staff turnover, layoffs or financial concerns that have impacted staff availability and experience.**

Description of County Practice	Exploratory Issue Rating				Barriers Identified/Initial Plans
	1	2	3	4	
Staff turnover has been an issue, mostly in the Child Protection unit. There appears to be two issues. The unit in the past has struggled with the philosophy of how the service should be delivered. The team has long discussions about the role of a case manager. Case managers were frustrated with the limited face to face time that could be provided to families due to the significant paperwork requirements. Secondly, we have had child protection workers transfer to neighboring countries, partially due to financial reasons. In the last 9 years, we have had 10 child protection workers move to neighboring counties. Sherburne County’s starting pay scale is \$3.00 an hour more than Benton’s, and Stearns County’s is \$2.00 more. In spite of these challenges, we have an experienced and well functioning child protection/child welfare Team.				X	

Overall Systemic Factor Rating for Supervisor and Social Worker Resources (Determine the overall systemic factor rating based on ratings of the preceding exploratory issues)			
Area Needing Improvement		Strength	
1	2	3	4
			X

## **I. Community Issues**

**This is not a rated systemic factor. Response to community issues provides the agency with the opportunity to assess and describe presenting issues in the county that could likely have an impact on child and family service planning and delivery, and on achievement of safety, permanency and well-being outcomes. Discuss such factors as population/demographic characteristics, significant recent change in demographics, poverty indicators, and/or population diversity, for examples.**

**Centrally located in the heart of the State, Benton County enjoys the best of both rural and urban worlds. Our residents respect and appreciate the serenity of a rural lifestyle on the acres of land which surround the many small towns and cities in the area. Yet, we are able to take advantage of the opportunities and convenience of the St. Cloud Metro Area. With a thriving economy and business sector, we feel fortunate to be part of one of the fastest growing areas in the state.**

**However, with growth comes challenges. Keeping pace with the capacity to provide social services to a larger population will be a challenge. Our management team frequently reviews whether we have the resources, both in terms of social workers and purchased services, to meet the needs of the community. Our Board has been supportive in allowing us to hire additional staff when necessary.**

**Addressing the changing cultural diversity issues will also be a challenge. Although currently Benton has a rather small minority population, this appears to be changing. An emphasis will be placed on cultural diversity training for staff along with ensuring that services are accessible, convenient and welcoming to Benton County residents of all cultures.**

## Part III: Safety and Permanency Data

### A. National Standard Indicators

**Table 1**

<b>Data Indicator</b>	<b>National Standard</b>	<b>County 2005</b>	<b>Minnesota 2005</b>
The national standard for <b>recurrence of maltreatment</b> is met if, of all children who were victims of determined maltreatment during the first six months of the period under review, 6.1% or fewer children have another determined report within 6 months.	6.1% ↓	3.8%* (26 – 1)	5.3%
The national standard for <b>incidence of child abuse/neglect in foster care</b> is met if, of all children in foster care, the percentage of children who were the subject of determined maltreatment by a foster parent is 0.57% or less.	.57% ↓	0%*	0.52%
The national standard for <b>foster care re-entries</b> is met if, of all children who entered foster care, 8.6% or fewer of those children re-entered foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care placement.	8.6% ↓	25%	19.3%
The national standard for <b>stability of foster care placements</b> is met if, of all children who have been in foster care less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal, 86.7% or more had no more than two placement settings.	86.7% ↑	98%*	89.8%
The national standard for <b>length of time to achieve reunification</b> is met if, of all children who were reunified with their parents or caretakers at the time of discharge from foster care, 76.2% or more were reunified in less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal from home.	76.2% ↑	90%*	91.4%
The national standard for <b>length of time to achieve adoption</b> is met if, of all children who exited care to a finalized adoptions, 32% or more exited care in less than 24 months.	32% ↑	60%*	47.0%

**B. Safety Data**

**Child Maltreatment Reports (Investigation): Alleged, Determined and Need for Service, 5 Year History**

**Table 2**

Year	Reports Assessed	Reports with Maltreatment Determined (Number of cases determined/ as % of reports assessed)	Reports with Child Protection Services Needed Determined (Number of cases determined/ as % of reports assessed)
2001	125	58 (46.4%)	62 (49.6%)
2002	80	43 (53.75%)	42 (52.5%)
2003	69	34 (49.2%)	42 (60.9%)
2004	79	45 (56.9%)	36 (45.6%)
2005	47	33 (70%)-	27 (57.4%)

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**Statewide rate of reports with maltreatment determined in 2005: 55.6%**

**Statewide rate of reports with child protection services needed determined in 2005: 43.6%**

**Child Maltreatment Reports (Family Assessment): History as Available/Applicable**

**Table 3**

Year	Number of Family Assessments / as percent of total maltreatment assessments	Number of Family Assessments with Subsequent Case Management Openings / as a percent of total AR assessments
2001	0	0
2002	45 (36%)	0
2003	39 (36%)	3 (7.6%)
2004	37 (31.6%)	3 (8.1%)
2005	48 (50.5%)	11 (22.9%)

**Statewide rate of reports assessed with Family Assessments (formerly Alternative Response) in 2005: 46.5%**

**Statewide rate of Family Assessments with Case Management Openings in 2005: 21.3%**

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Reasons for Entering Out-of-Home-Care, Related to Protection-2005

Table 4

Reason	State %	County #	County %
Alleged Physical Abuse	6.3%	8	5%
Alleged Sexual Abuse	3.0%	2	1.2%
Alleged Neglect	19.8%	25	15.8%
Parent Alcohol Abuse	4.9%	2	1.2%
Parent Drug Abuse	12.4%	14	8.9%
Abandonment	3.7%	7	4.4%
Relinquishment of Parental Rights	1.0%	2	1.2%
Parent Incarceration	3.6%	6	3.8%
Total Reasons Reported for All Placements	25,002	158	--
Total Placements	24,278	134	--
Total Reasons Related to Protection	54.7%	66	41.8%

Reasons for Entering Out-of-Home-Care, Other than Protection-2005

Table 5

Reason	State %	County #	County %
Child Alcohol Abuse	1.3%	0	0%
Child Drug Abuse	2.7%	5	3.1%
Child Behavior	23.6%	46	29.1%
Child Disability	3.6%	4	2.5%
Parent Death	0.3%	1	.74%
Caretaker Inability to Cope	10.1%	18	11.4%
Inadequate Housing	3.7%	18	11.4%
Total Reasons Reported for All Placements	25,002	158	--
Total Placements	24,278	134	--
Total Reasons Other than Protection	45.3%	92	58.2%

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## C. Permanency Data

Gender of Children in Care-2005

Table 6

Gender	State %	County #	County %
Male	53.8%	48	54.5%
Female	46.2%	40	45.5%
Total Children in Care	14,723	88	

Age Group of Children in Care-2005

Table 7

Age Group	State %	County #	County %
0-7 Years	31.1%	23	26%
8-12 Years	15.7%	16	18%
13+ Years	53.1%	49	56%
Total Children in Care	14,723	88	

Race of Children in Care-2005

Table 8

Race	State % of Placements	County # of Children in Placement	County % of Placements	% of Racial Group in County's General Population
White	56.3%	72	81.8%	96.2%
American Indian or Alaska Native	11.5%	1	1.1%	unknown
African American/Black	20.0%	6	6.8%	.8%
Asian	2.0%	3	3.4%	1.1%
Two or More Races	7.1%	3	3.4%	.9%
Pacific Islander/ Unknown/Missing Data/ Other	0.1%	0	0	
Hispanic Ethnicity*	7.8%	3	3.4%	.9%
Total Children in Care	14,723	88		

\*Hispanic may be of any race.

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MN State Demographic Center, 2000 Census

**Children in Out-of-Home Care by Placement Setting-2005**  
 (Children may be counted in more than one placement setting)

**Table 9**

<b>Placement Setting</b>	<b>State %</b>	<b>County #</b>	<b>County %</b>
Foster Family Non-Relative	40.0%	46	34.3%
Foster Family Relative	16.2%	26	19.4%
Foster Home – Corporate/Shift Staff	0.7%	0	0
Group Home	12.5%	32	23.9%
ICF-MR	0.1%	0	0
Juvenile Correctional Facility (non-secure, 12 or fewer children)	0.6%	1	.75%
Juvenile Correctional Facility (non-secure, 13 or more children)	3.4%	3	2.2%
Pre-Adoptive Non-Relative	3.5%	7	5.2%
Pre-Adoptive Relative	1.9%	2	1.5%
Residential Treatment Center	20.8%	17	12.7%
Supervised Independent Living	0.2%	0	0
Total Placement Settings	24,278	134	

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## PART IV: ASSESSMENT OF SAFETY, PERMANENCY AND WELL-BEING PERFORMANCE

### A. Safety

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

**Based on examination of safety data and other data available to the county, please respond to the following questions. Use SSIS reports and charting and analysis as recommended to aid in the evaluation of issues and performance related to the achievement of safety outcomes.**

1. **Trends, Tables 2-3.** Have there been notable changes in the measures of child safety over time? Identify and discuss factors that have affected the changes noted and the effects on the safety of children.

Most measures of child safety have been remarkably consistent. Our screening criteria has remained consistent, with minor changes occurring due to statutory changes. We continuously work to maintain our working relationships with key stakeholders in the community. We have an active Stearns/Benton child protection Team, Benton Case Consultation Team and Benton Children's Justice Initiative.

2. **Child Maltreatment, Table 2.** Examine the data on reports of child maltreatment. Identify and discuss factors that may have contributed to an increase or decrease in the numbers maltreatment reports, any issues affecting the rate of determined reports and factors that influence decision making. Use the following SSIS Reports to aid the evaluation of child maltreatment: SSIS General Reports - Intake Statistics by Program Area, Intake Allegations by CP Track, Maltreatment Allegation Summary; SSIS Charting and Analysis - Measure SSIS 2.

The number of reports received each year has increased significantly. Ten years ago we generally received about 300 reports a year. The last several years we have received approximately 600 reports a year. We believe this is a strength in that the community has confidence in our CPS system and are willing to report.

Family Assessment Response has been fully implemented and we believe it to be an effective tool.

The number of reports screened in for assessment/investigation has been remarkably consistent over the years. On average we assess/investigate 114 reports each year.

3. **Cases with Need for Services Determined, Table 2.** Compare the cases with need for services determined following a report of maltreatment to the rates of determined maltreatment. Discuss the issues affecting opening cases following reports of maltreatment and reasons cases are not opened. Use the following SSIS Reports to aid the evaluation of cases with services determined: SSIS General Reports - Child Maltreatment

Summary-Family Assessments, Maltreatment Disposition Summary; SSIS Charting and Analysis - Measure SSIS 2.

Our five year average of reports with maltreatment determination is 54%. The state average in 2005 is 55%. Overall, we believe we are very consistent in the criteria we use to determine maltreatment. All traditional investigation determinations are made by our Child Protection Team.

Our five year average of reports with child protection services needed is 52%. The state average for 2005 is 43%. It appears Benton has a slightly higher rate of determining protective services needed than the rest of the state. However, we believe we are very consistent in how we utilize the risk assessments tool in determining protective services needed (High or Intensive Risk of Abuse or Neglect). In addition, all Risk determination for traditional investigations are made by our child protection team.

4. **Children Entering Foster Care for Reasons of Protection, Table 4-5.** Identify and discuss issues affecting the provision of home-based services to prevent placement and protect children from maltreatment and whether or not there is a relationship between this data and other issues, such as availability/accessibility of services to protect children. Use the following SSIS Reports to aid the evaluation of children entering foster care for protection: SSIS General Report - Children in Out-of-Home Case – Occurrence Information Only.

Child(ren) are only removed from their home when they are likely to be in danger of immediate harm. Home Based Services, Community Services and Family supports are utilized whenever possible to ensure that the child(ren) are conditionally safe while their parent(s) cooperate with child protection services. At times Family Based Services are not as available as we would like. However, we do not believe this has effected the safety of children.

5. **Recurrence of Maltreatment, Table 1.** Discuss whether or not the county's recurrence of maltreatment conforms to the national standard for this indicator and how the county addresses repeat maltreatment. Use the following SSIS Reports to aid in the evaluation of performance on recurrence of maltreatment: SSIS Charting and Analysis - Federal Indicator, Measure 1.1; Minnesota Outcome Indicators Measure MN 1 and MN 2.

Our recurrent of maltreatment percentage (3.8%) is lower than the state (5.3%) and National (61%) average.

Benton County Human Services identifies repeat maltreatment cases and makes a special effort to review these cases at our weekly unit meeting and community case consultation team. Depending upon the risk, we may review these cases with our County Attorney's Office for a possible CHIPS petition.

6. **Incidence of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Foster Care, Table 1.** Discuss whether or not the county's incidence of child maltreatment by the foster care provider conforms to the national standard for this indicator. Discuss how the county addresses this issue and the need for any measures to ensure the safety of children who are in foster care or pre-adoptive care.

Benton County has not had cases of maltreatment in foster homes.

- 7. Screening and Assessment.** Describe the agency's performance on conducting intake, screening, assignment and initiation of assessment in response to reports of maltreatment. Discuss how the agency's capacity to make screening decisions and assign a case for assessment the same day a report is received impacts timeliness of response. Use the following SSIS Reports to aid in the evaluation of screening and assessment performance: General Reports - Time to Initial Contact with Victim/Other, Child Maltreatment Assessment Aging, and Child Maltreatment Assessment Detail; SSIS Charting and Analysis - Measure SSIS 1.

One social worker is primarily responsible for intake responsibilities, and all social Workers sign up for a day of back-up intake each month. The back-up intake worker takes the report if the primary worker is busy with a walk-in or already taking a report. Most reports are screened on the day of intake. Our intake worker helps determine if an immediate response to the report may be necessary. If so, the team is called together to screen the report and if screened in, to assign for assessment/investigation. If the report does not require an immediate response, the report is routed to our screening team of four (intake worker, two assessment workers and CP Supervisor). Each person writes on the intake summary whether the report should be screened in or out and why. If screened in the supervisor then assign's.

In 2005, 60% of all assessments were initiated within 24 hours, and 80% were initiated within 72 hours. A partial reason for 20% of our assessments being initiated over 120 hours may be a SSIS data entry error, with a new assessment worker learning SSIS. In 2006, 76% of all assessments were initiated within 24 hours and 95% were initiated within 120 hours.

- 8. Family Assessment (formerly Alternative Response), Table 3.** Describe protocols or criteria that have been developed to guide screening decisions and assignment of child maltreatment reports to investigation or family assessment? How does the agency's rate of family assessment compare to estimated rates?

The SSIS Family Assessment Response Initial Screening Tool is used to assist in making tracking decisions, along with discussions between screening team members. In 2005 Family Assessment response was used 50% of the time, which is near the state average of 46%.

- 9. Other Safety Issues.** Discuss any other issues of concern, not covered above, that affect the safety outcomes for children and families served by the agency. Examples might include the agency's response to co-occurrence of child maltreatment and domestic violence, or the impact of methamphetamines on the child protection system.

## **B. Permanency**

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

**Based on the examination of permanency data and other data available to the county, please respond to the following questions. Use SSIS reports and charting and analysis as recommended to aid in the evaluation of issues and performance related to the achievement of permanency outcomes.**

1. **Foster Care Population, Tables 4-9.** Identify and discuss issues raised by data regarding the composition of the county's foster care population. Discuss the county's ability to ensure that the children who enter foster care are only those children whose needs for protection and care cannot be met in their own homes.

Unless an emergency placement is made by Law Enforcement, all placement decisions are reviewed by our child protection team. All Family preservation services are considered in an effort to keep a child(ren) conditionally safe in their home. Only when it is determined that the child(ren)'s safety cannot be ensured that a CHIPS petition is filed and the court orders the placement.

2. **Placement Types for Children in Foster Care, Table 9.** How well is the county able to ensure that children are placed in the types of placements that are the most family-like and most appropriate for their individual needs, both at the time of initial entry into foster care and throughout their stay in foster care? Use the following SSIS Reports to aid in the evaluation of placement types for children in foster care: Charting and Analysis - Federal Indicator Measure 7.1; General Reports – County of Children in Out-of-Home Care–By Setting.

Benton County Human Services completes thorough relative searches and makes every effort to place children in relative foster care. In 2005, Benton County Human Services had 72 Foster care placements. 46 or 64% were county placements and 26 or 36% were relative placements. On average, several times a year, Benton County Human Services uses the Interstate Compact System to help license relative homes outside of Minnesota.

3. **Achievement of Reunification, Table 1.** Discuss whether the county's data regarding achievement of reunification within 12 months from the time of the latest removal from the home conforms to the national standard for this indicator. Identify and discuss issues affecting conformity and how the county is addressing the issues. Use the following SSIS Reports to aid in the evaluation of achieving reunification: SSIS Charting and Analysis - Federal Indicator Measures 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, and 4.1; Minnesota Outcome Indicators, Measure MN 4.

In 2005 90% of all children in placement were reunified within 12 month's. This exceeds the national standard. All professionals in our Benton County system have placed an emphasis on the importance of timeliness.

4. **Achievement of Adoption, Table 1.** Discuss whether the county's data on children exiting foster care to a finalized adoption within less than 24 months from the latest removal from home conforms to the national standard for this indicator. Identify and

discuss issues affecting the number of children placed for adoption and how the county is addressing the issues. Use the following SSIS Reports to aid in the evaluation of achievement of adoption: SSIS Charting and Analysis - Federal Indicator, Measure 5.1 and 5.2; and Minnesota Outcome Indicators, Measure MN 5 and MN 6.

In 2005, Benton County Human Services exceeded the National and State standard in that 60% of all children exited care to a finalized adoption in less than 24 months.

- 5. Stability of Foster Care Placements, Table 1.** Discuss whether the percentage of children in the county who have been in foster care less than 12 months and have had no more than two placement settings conforms to the national standard for this indicator. Identify and discuss the reasons for the movement of children in foster care. Use the following SSIS reports to aid in the evaluation of stability of foster care placements: SSIS Charting and Analysis - Federal Indicator Measure 6.1 and Measure SSIS 7; SSIS General Reports - Placements/Locations/Absences by Client.

Benton County Human Services exceeded the National and State average in 2005 in that 98% of all children who have been in foster care less than 12 month's had no more than two placement settings.

Benton County Human Services makes every effort to provide the training and support to our foster parents in hopes of a successful placement. We offer frequent contacts with social workers, therapeutic support and respite care. In addition to the development of positive relationships with our foster parents we attempt to show appreciation of their services in additional ways including an annual summer foster care appreciation picnic, appreciation certificates from the county board, appreciation gifts, and holiday cards.

- 6. Foster Care Re-Entries, Table 1.** Discuss whether the percentage of children in foster care who had an entry into foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode conforms to the national standard for this indicator. Identify and discuss the extent of foster care re-entries, the issues affecting re-entries and how the county is addressing the issues. Use the following SSIS Reports to aid in the evaluation of foster care re-entries: Charting and Analysis, Federal Indicator Measure 4.2; CW System Activity Indicator, Measure SSIS 8.

In 2005, Benton County Human Services was above the National and State average in foster care entries. Our child protection team frequently discusses this concern and reviews the re-entry data. Although, we recognize the concern, we also believe that we follow-best practice to have children reunited with their parents when we believe they are conditionally safe. Safety is always of utmost concern. Sometime children are reunified and later need to re-enter the foster care system when their parent does not follow the case plan. Benton County Human Services has begun to use the Trial Home visit process and believes this will reduce our re-entry rate. Also, we believe our re-entry rate has been over inflated due to corrections and children's mental health placements.

- 7. Length of Stay in Foster Care.** Discuss the length of stay of children in foster care. Identify and discuss factors affecting the length of stay and how the county is addressing

the issues. Use the following SSIS Reports to aid in the evaluation of length of stay in foster care: General Reports - Children in Children in Out-of-Home Care-by Occurrence Start Date; most current *Minnesota Child Welfare Report*.

In comparing the Benton County Human Services data for length of Episodes in 2005 with the state data (from Minnesota Child Welfare Report), Benton County's "Days in placement" is very comparable to the state average in most categories, except one. Benton had 15 children or 27% (state 22%) in placement for more than 365 days. However, in 2005 Benton County Human Services had a number of children in our care who were free for adoption. At times the adoption finalizations simply take longer than expected.

8. **Long-Term Foster Care.** Discuss the current use of long-term foster care as a permanency goal for children. Examine how the processes in place to consider and rule out other more permanent goals, ongoing/annual review of the appropriateness of the goal and services to support the child and foster parent help the county achieve improved permanency outcomes. Use the following SSIS Charting and Analysis Report to aid in the evaluation of long-term foster care: Minnesota Outcome Indicators, Measure MN 3.

Benton County Human Services considers all other permanency options before permanent foster care. Currently we have four children in permanent foster care. In two of the cases the children are in relative foster homes. In both of these cases the relatives insisted upon the placement being permanent foster care rather than a permanent transfer of custody. In both cases, the attachment of the child to the relative was preserved. In the third case, the child is a ward and chose not to be adopted. As a result she is placed in a non-relative permanent foster home. In the fourth case an adolescent sex offender needs a long term specialized therapeutic foster home.

9. **Other Permanency Issues.** Discuss any other issues of concern that affect the permanency outcomes for children and families served by the agency

### **C. Well-Being**

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

**Based on any data the county has available, please respond to the following questions. Use SSIS reports and charting and analysis as recommended to aid in the evaluation of issues and performance related to the achievement of well-being outcomes.**

1. **Frequency of Contact between Caseworkers and Children and their Families.** Examine and discuss any data the county has available about the frequency of contact between

caseworkers and the children and families on their caseloads. Identify and discuss issues that affect the frequency of contacts and how the frequency of contacts affects the outcomes for children and families served by the agency. Use the following SSIS Reports to aid in the evaluation of frequency of contact: General Reports - Work Groups that Need Contact; SSIS Charting and Analysis - Measure SSIS 4 and SSIS 5.

Contacts between social workers and the children and families are influenced by risk assessments, intensity levels, distance and cooperative level of the parents. Social workers and the supervisors discuss issues regularly to assure frequent contacts. SSIS Data states that 62% of all families have had a face to face contact in the last 30 days. 87% of all families have had a face to face contact in the last 60 days. Benton County Human Services believes we are doing a good job in seeing families regularly. Many unique factors contribute to this data sometimes being skewed, including parents whereabouts being unknown, children in long term foster care placement, children in placement outside of the Benton County area where other service providers are seeing those children on our behalf.

2. **Case Planning.** Describe the county's performance on developing case plans for children and families receiving child protection services and for children in placement. Use the following SSIS Reports to aid in the evaluation of case planning: General Reports - Workgroups without Open Service Plans, Service Plan Report, and Placements without Open OHPP's.

Our team frequently talks about timely development of case plans and quality of case plans. The social workers and supervisor also discuss case plan issues during monthly supervisory meetings.

3. **Educational Status of Children.** Examine and discuss any data the county has available regarding the educational status of children in its care and placement responsibility. How does the county ensure that the educational needs of children are identified in assessments and case planning and that those needs are addressed through services?

Educational needs are discussed within the case plans and the school system is consulted to ensure that the child's educational needs are being met. Social workers attend IEP and other school staffing's as needed and work closely with foster parents to ensure the foster child's educational needs are met.

4. **Health Care for Children.** Examine and discuss any data the county has available regarding the provision of health care, including EPSDT, to children in its care and placement responsibility. How does the county ensure that the physical health and medical needs of children are identified in assessments and case planning activities and that those needs are addressed through services?

Health care needs are discussed as part of the case planning with the parents and foster parents. All foster children received their necessary physical and dental check-ups. Our Agency has a public health nurse that contacts the foster parent to facilitate the EPSPT check-up.

5. **Mental Health for Children.** Examine and discuss any data the county has available regarding the mental health needs and status of children in its care and placement

responsibility. How does the county ensure that the mental health needs of children are identified in assessments and case planning activities and that those needs are addressed through services? Use the following SSIS Reports to aid in the evaluation of mental health for children: General Reports - CMH Screening Detail, CMH Screening Exception Report, CMH Screening Totals-by Status.

Mental Health needs for children receiving CPS services are assessed on an individual basis and services are provided. The children's Mental Health Screening Tool is utilized whenever parents consent. Often times formal diagnostic assessments and on-going treatment is recommended by the court. The case plan clearly identifies those services. Child protection team often makes referrals to community providers and/or the county mental health team. At times child protection families are assigned both a child protection worker and a children's mental health worker. The child protection team often consults with the mental health professional supervising children's mental health.

6. **Other Well-Being Issues.** Discuss any other issues of concern, not covered above that impact performance on the well-being outcomes for children and families served by the agency.

Well being measures for Benton County children are measured by the Children's Defense Fund of Minnesota (MN Kids: A closer look 2005). No areas of concern were reported based on the indicators from this study.

## **PART V: SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND NEEDS**

**Based on examination of data and narrative responses provided in early sections of this report, summarize the information in response to the following questions.**

1. What specific strengths of the agency's programs have been identified?

Benton County Human Services child protection/welfare workers operate as a team and have good internal working relationships.

Benton County Human Services has developed good partnerships with other professionals in the community.

2. What specific needs have been identified that warrant further examination in the onsite review? Note which of these needs are the most critical to the outcomes under safety, permanency and well-being for children and families in the county.

None

3. Please complete the following evaluation of the county self assessment process in terms of its usefulness to the county and recommendations for revision.
  - a) Were the self assessment instructions and assistance from quality assurance staff helpful to you in the completion of the self assessment process? Yes/No

Comments:

- b) Were you allowed adequate time to complete the county self assessment process?  
Yes/No

Comments:

- c) Did you find the data provided and the references to SSIS reports helpful to your evaluation of safety, permanency and well-being performance? Yes/No

Comments:

- d) Did you engage county child welfare staff and/or community stakeholders in the county self- assessment process? Yes/No

Comments: Staff provided some input which was helpful. However, staff are busy with high case loads which did not allow them to have the time to devote themselves to the self-assessment.

- e) Did you find the county self assessment an effective process for evaluating your county's child welfare system? Yes/No

Comments: Yes, it was helpful. However, it may have simply reinforced what we already knew. The Agency does a good job with ensuring safety, permanency and wellbeing. Finding time to document those efforts is sometimes difficult.

- f) Will you use findings from the county self assessment to plan for systemic and/or organizational improvements in your county's child welfare system? Yes/No

Comments:

- g) Any additional comments or recommendations for improving the self assessment process: